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ADDRESS OF THE OAS SECRETARY GENERAL, JOSE MIGUEL INSULZA, AT THE  
CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

(April 15, 2009 - Carnival Victory, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago)

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I first want to thank the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for sponsoring this Civil Society Forum over the last two days to exchange information and views on the priorities of the inter-American agenda, and how to accomplish the objectives of this Fifth Summit of the Americas.

We have been working on this for quite some time, we had several meetings and fora, and of course, tomorrow is the time in which you will present, not really the conclusions, those have already been included, to some extent into the document, but rather the ways of moving forward with the objectives and goals of the Summit.

Now, this is not the first or the last time that we have a chance to attend this forum. Civil society has strengthened very largely in the last twenty years as a result of a democratic process in the Hemisphere

But as is always natural, there is always certain tension between the grassroots organizations, the organizations that promote the views of the common citizens and government institutions. We have different procedures, sometimes different styles, sometimes different ways of action; the issue is that we have managed to deal in the past ten years, in this context of the Summits and the OAS General Assemblies with a lot of respect and a lot of tolerance each other's views.

We began actually to some extent, permit me Minister to say, share a personal memory on this, in the 1998, when we had the Summit of the Americas in Santiago, Chile, and at that time the civil society was meeting in some other part of town, and of course the labor leaders were there and also other organizations were there their having their own summit

And they asked to present the conclusions, which was not programmed, I remember I met with the Foreign Ministers, and I said we should receive them, and we should talk to them, and most of the Ministers agreed and we had the first meeting which have become institutionalized along the years. Many governments have stressed very much the need for this kind of meetings in the Summits and in the Assemblies, and it has grown and has expanded to become a part of the regular agenda of the events, I think that this ever-greater participation of civil society in the inter-American dialogue and in the design of public policies is a reflection of a democratic growth.

The summit of the Americas gave new impetus and great importance to the participation of civil society in their own agenda. It was recognized formally only three years after the Santiago meeting in 1998. In 2001 the Summit of the Americas in Quebec recognized civil society important role in the consolidation of democracy, and in the design of government programs.

We will continue to promote this principle according to our charter and to our democratic charter of the Americas, and we will continue creating opportunities within the organization of Americans States for civil society to respond to critical issues in the inter-American agenda, and we will continue working with civil society to promote the implementation and follow up of Summit mandates.

It is really important to remind us of some of the things that we have managed to get the civil society. We have managed first to incorporate civil society in many of our specific deliberations, not

only in the Summits. It is important to see how civil society organizations have contributed to transparency and access to public information in the Americas. We have also seen them create offices for the defense of disenfranchised women in some countries. We have a strong number of women organizations working with us in the verification of the Convention of violence against women; we have a strong movement that accompanies us on matters of human rights, on the issues of corruption, on the issue of promotion of democracy, of environment, on so many issues. Every time we have this array of organizations that are accompanying the verification process or our advances in matters of democracy, are also pointing a finger at the moment in which our limitations, and there are very limitations are shown and that is what we have to protect.

I think that it is important that we continue this process. Sometimes there are big limitations, as we have seen today, sometimes it just comes from the nature of the organizations we have in. Governments are always in a hurry, with no time, counting the time, if you have only fifty minutes, you have to stick to five minutes.

Civil society is made of people how have made different choices; they have chosen to fight for a certain cause at the grassroots of society and to continue buttering, and proposing and presenting thinks to governments, to congresses, to the societies and they phrase the democracy, but more democracy they have, the more they demand, the more they point out, the more they denounce, the more they challenge us to live in a better way.

If I have to describe what I think of civil society and the role it plays in our common activities. I have to remind myself of famous words of the whom if from my same nation, of Pablo Neruda, who once described, when receiving the Nobel Prize for literature, has described his role as an activist, and a person fighting for what he believed in for several years, as an activity of 'burning patience'. Burning in the sense that he never stopped fighting for what he believed in; patience in the sense that he has to understand that it is a difficult role, as someone said here it is difficult role, it's a suffering role, but the more democracy we have, the more it is recognized in society, and your presence here is a probe of that.

I ask you to continue working with us, I am sure that together, your government, your organizations, but also your strong grassroots effort, will continue to make our democracy, and our countries each time better.

Thank you very much.