



**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON, MINISTER OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, AT THE
SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY DIALOGUE “ENGAGING PARLIAMENTS IN THE
SUMMITS OF THE AMERICAS’ PROCESS”**

**PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, RED HOUSE, PORT OF SPAIN
THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2009**

Senator The Honourable Danny Montano, President of the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago;
The Honourable Barendra Sinanan, MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives;
Honourable Ministers of Government;
Honourable Ministers of the Senate and the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago;
President of FIPA, Honourable Luiz Carlos Hauly;
His Excellency, Jose Miguel Insulza; Secretary General of the Organization of American States;
Ministers of Foreign Affairs;
Members of FIPA Executive Committee;
Members of the media;
Ladies and gentlemen.

Our purpose today is to explore the potential for deeper co-operation between parliaments and governments to advance the hemispheric goals outlined in the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain, soon to be addressed by the Heads of State and Government of the Americas.

The nations of the Western Hemisphere have long had a dream of Pan-Americanism, commencing in the 19th Century with co-operation among the nations of Central North and Central America and the Caribbean in a variety of activities, economic, social and political.

The Summits of the Americas represent our revisiting of the Pan-American idea. A brief survey of the Summits of the Americas thus far provides a useful indication of the organic development of this process.

The First Summit held in Florida in 1994, focused in large part on economic hemispheric integration which, in due course, led to the concept and elaboration of the Free Trade Area of the



Americas (FTAA). Its establishment was envisaged by 2005, and major tenets included such principles as market access, investment, government procurement, anti-dumping and countervailing duties, agriculture and intellectual property rights.

The Second Summit in Chile in 1998, revealed their concerns of the period; education, democracy and human rights, poverty elimination, the environment, sustainable development, energy and international action against drug trafficking. The Declaration of Santiago affirmed the following:

- Strengthening of the co-operation forged by the Inaugural Summit held in Miami;
- The benefits of open-market based trades since the Miami Summit;
- The opportunities forged by the process of globalization, making mention also of the inherent disparities occasioned by globalization;
- The importance of continuity between Summits;
- The benefits of continued negotiation of the FTAA;
- The contribution of international regional bodies in the hemisphere;
- The need to address gender discrimination and equal rights;
- The importance of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man;
- The problem of inequity and social exclusion;
- The importance of environmental protection for sustainable development; and
- The need to strengthen energy links between countries of the hemisphere and to intensify trade in the energy sector.

Quebec was the venue of the Third Summit and the Quebec Summit floated, among other things, agri-business as a tool for poverty reduction and championed also the contribution of migrants to society.

Quebec coined the phrase “Connecting the Americas” and made emphasis on ICTs for education. Social equity, economic development and cultural diversity were discussed, and of interest is the hosting in this period of the indigenous conclave in Guatemala and the Indigenous Peoples’ Summit in Ottawa.



Quebec was notable also for its stress on the importance of implementation by Foreign Ministers of mandates of the Summit, in this instance, via the reform of the Organization of American States. Civil society and its inclusion came to the fore in Quebec. My Canadian colleagues will agree that the themes of the Quebec Summit reflect the strategies of that area, and it may be noted the backdrop of the events of the 9/11 tragedy.

The Inter-American Democratic Charter and the convening of the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism occurred at this time, and Quebec provided a memorable phrase which continues to resonate today, “Committed to making this the Century of the Americas”. The topics of that Summit revealed both the spirit of the time and the change in the agenda required to deal with our hemispheres’ ills, renewable energy, poverty and inequality, natural disaster mitigation, migrants and trafficking of persons, most of them requiring a drug interdiction strategy to combat the global drug trade and its related ills, namely, violence and corruption and measures to combat HIV/AIDS.

Remedies identified included free and open economies, market access, capital financial stability, sustained investment flows, public policies, access to technically oriented human resource development and training. It was hoped that all this would lead to eradication of poverty and the reduction by 50 per cent of the rank of the poor by 2015.

Then, the Fourth Summit of the Americas was held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, and it emphasized a framework for decent work. The Declaration of Mar del Plata: “Creating Jobs to Fight Poverty and Strengthen Democratic Governance”, spoke clearly of remedies for the ills of this hemisphere. The remedies, at that time, were seen as growth and employment, jobs to fight poverty, training of the labour force, micro-enterprises and small and medium sized enterprises as the engine of growth, employment generation and citizen participation. It advocates raising the standard of living and democratic governance as a weapon against poverty, inequality, hunger and social exclusion.

Following, therefore, on the heels of the Fourth Summit of the Americas and the awareness that



there were deficiencies in the approach or lack of implementation, in the Declaration of Port of Spain at the 5th Summit of the Americas and at the urging of Prime Minister Manning, one sees the emphasis on implementation.

The theme of the Fifth Summit of the Americas is: “Securing Our Citizen's Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability.”

In a break with the tradition of the Summits of the American Process, only one declaratory document will be approved by the Heads of State and Government. The document, the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain, has 66 paragraphs and is sub-divided into a preamble and six sections and the sections are: Promoting human prosperity. The one thread which has woven throughout the declaration is the citizens of the Americas in the future of the hemisphere. The section in the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain on promoting human prosperity is the most detailed of the declaration. The challenges include poverty and vulnerability, so that there must be continued promotion of access to education, health, nutrition, energy and basic social services. This is particularly relevant in the current economic and financial crisis.

With regard to promoting energy security, energy is seen as essential to improving the standard of living of the citizens of the Americas. There are a range of policies and initiatives in the energy security agenda of the Western Hemisphere. It is expected that there will be co-operation to improve the security, the safety, the quality, the reliability and protection of critical energy infrastructure and supplied networks. There is also a need to develop co-operation strategies to promote access to reliable, efficient, affordable and clean energy.

Promoting environmental sustainability, the Declaration recognizes the adverse effect of climate change on all countries, in particular, small island developing states and countries with low-lying coast. There is also reaffirmation and the commitment to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations and the positive impact decrocts in greenhouse gas emissions will have.

As to strengthening public security, there is widespread understanding in the Declaration of



various threats facing the Americas, and there will be commitments to fight all forms of transnational organized crimes to enhance co-operation and adequate resources.

As to democratic governance, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago pays great attention to the role of democratic governance in its nation building and in the country's overall development. Our Vision 2020 operational plan 2007-2010 contains specific strategies to strengthen governance systems and practices in both the public and private sectors. These would include: fostering a culture of good governance and integrity, as well as reducing the opportunities for corruption and the abuse of power.

We are, therefore, encouraged that these elements are reflected in the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain. It is equally appropriate for special mention to be made of the role of good governance at the local government level, and the importance of enhancing decentralization, local government and citizen participation.

Never to be forgotten in the enhancing of democratic governance is the respect for human rights and the enforcement of the rule of law. Our freedoms must never be taken for granted, and we must always try to ensure that the most vulnerable in our societies are cared for and have access to the basic necessities of life. This has been recognized in the Declaration and so is in tandem with our own domestic agenda.

A responsible government will, therefore, seek to ensure the welfare of its entire people and that its social and economic programmes will filter through the systems in place bringing security and prosperity. Again, these elements have been reflected in the Declaration, and we will work assiduously towards the implementation of the mandates contained in the document.

Another sub-theme is: "Strengthening the Summit of the Americas Follow-up and Implementation Effectiveness". We acknowledged that the current systems in place for the implementation of the mandates need improvement.

We, as parliamentarians, are duty bound to represent the people. Our focus must be on citizens.



When citizens exercise their franchise they expect those elected or appointed to seek their interest impartially. The role of parliamentarians in posing pertinent questions therefore arises. It is their agenda, the people's agenda and not ours. I exhort you, colleagues, to use your influence to urge and support governments in fulfillment of their commitments expressed in the Summits.

Our Prime Minister advocated the adoption of one declaratory document which should reflect clear objectives, expectations and time frames for implementations, and I believe the Declaration of Port of Spain will achieve this.

Our role as parliamentarians, however, is to demand of the State the status of the implementation of mandates and to enquire into the status of the submission of contrary reports and their contents. Furthermore, we should introduce and support legislation which may be required to give effect to the targets set.

The Declaration of Commitment, for example, speaks to protecting the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities; enforcement of hemispheric treaties which pertain to the illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition, drug interdiction, all forms of transnational organized crime and kidnapping, the impact of criminal gangs, illicit trafficking in persons, the increased impact of crimes associated with the use of technology, including cyber crime, and legislation befitting these issues, and the result and mandates must be pursued and, indeed, some of this have already been pursued and introduced by our Government.

As parliamentarians, we are required to educate our citizens and our constituents on the contents of the Declaration of the Commitment to Port of Spain, so that there will be greater involvement on their part. This was clearly indicated by the inclusion of the provision which recognizes the role of local government in good governance. This has been deemed the tool for enhancing the role of citizens and strengthening democracy and attaining sustainable development. Colleagues, your parliamentary debates should provide avenues for the promotion of transparency and ethical behaviour.

The Declaration obliges us to insist that the State does, in fact, reaffirm its commitment to



sustainable development and we, therefore, must promote a green Parliament in every way possible.

The Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA), our collaborator today, promotes the participation of and dialogue among parliamentarians on parliamentarism of the hemisphere in the inter-American system on the issues of importance to the hemisphere and the Summit of the Americas presents the perfect ground for such discussion. FIPA's objectives are noteworthy and they include inter-parliamentary dialogue with respect to the hemispheric agenda, inter-parliamentary corporation, strengthening the role of the legislator and promoting the harmonization of legislation. These objectives are in coherence with the objectives of the Summit of the Americas and also provide the necessary synergies with the decisions of previous Summits.

The Fifth Summit of the Americas comes at a pivotal time in our history, a time when the problems facing citizens seem gargantuan. Our world is in crisis and the global financial crisis has caused much trauma which has affected almost every aspect of our lives and indeed many gains have been reversed. We must use our convening as parliamentarians to discuss ways of securing the future of our citizens despite the current economic and other challenges. We, the Americas, are not immune to the shocks and upheavals experienced by all other regions of the world, therefore cooperation and collaboration among all actors and meaningful consultation with the citizenry constitute the way forward.

I wish you well with the rest of your discussions in today's proceedings.

I thank you very much.