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ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE PATRICK MANNING,
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AT THE
OPENING OF THE YOUTH AND PRIVATE SECTOR FORA

“Social Innovation and Implementation: Citizens in Motion”

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

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I am very pleased to extend a gracious welcome to all of you here this morning, and of course, we are especially happy to have those of you who are visitors to Trinidad and Tobago with us. I thank you for the effort you have made to participate in these critical discussions at a time when not just the Americas, but the entire global community is experiencing the varying impacts of the sweeping financial and economic turmoil which has disturbed the economic and social equilibrium of the world.

It is an honor for me as Chairman of the Fifth Summit of the Americas to be addressing you at the opening of your deliberations. Trinidad and Tobago as the host country and co-architect of these proceedings has, from the outset, worked assiduously with our partners in the Americas towards the goal of ensuring that this Summit will be as inclusive as possible.

As members of the Private Sector and Youth Fora, you are part of a fundamental link with all communities of the Americas. You are here because we have made every effort to incorporate the perspectives and experiences of the widest cross section of actors across the Hemisphere, and we are grateful for your participation in the process. You are the eyes, ears and voices of communities across the Americas. Not even for a fleeting moment, therefore, do I want you to undervalue your role at this Summit.

Your contribution is critical as the world is facing waves of economic crises that are without parallel in our history. I see this, however, not only as a time of crisis, but more so as a time of tremendous opportunity. Your roles therefore, in assisting this Summit with resolving some of the economic distress within the communities of the Americas, make you key to its overall success. Of comparable value and importance to the outcome of our deliberations at this Fifth Summit of the Americas are the results of similar debates that are taking place in the Civil Society Forum and other parallel groups representing the people of the Hemisphere.

On day one of the Summit, delegates from the two groups assembled here will join parallel delegations representing labour, agribusiness, and indigenous societies to engage in dialogue with the Foreign Ministers of the Americas. The results of this interface will be conveyed by these Ministers to their respective Heads of Government. You are assured therefore that the outcome of your deliberations will reach the highest level of this Summit.

Allow me now to address some remarks directly to each of the groups assembled here. I begin with the delegates of the Youth Forum. This is the first time in the history of the Summit of the Americas that we have arranged a separate forum for youth. You have earned that place.

Throughout the Hemisphere, our youth has been an inspiration to us. From Pelé to Usain Bolt, Brian Lara to Michael Phelps, in many areas of endeavour, youth have been the pioneers, the trendsetters. In music, art, fashion and sport, you are the creators of the new.

It was the youth of my country who, driven by their creativity and innovativeness, in the 1930s, out of discarded oil-drums, created the Steelpan, reputed to be the only new acoustic instrument of the 20th

century. It was young Martin Luther King Jr. who, driven by his passion for equality, changed the course of history. Truly, youth has earned a place at this Summit.

Your participation was originally conceived as a vehicle to enable young people to become more involved in entrepreneurship and business development. But we recognise that you have a greater role. Your new agenda has a strong element of business, but sits within a wider portfolio which now allows you to address other aspects of youth development. Your work therefore would be more closely aligned to the overall theme of the Summit, "Securing our Citizens Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability".

I am extremely happy about your expanded agenda. I strongly urge that during your deliberations you make it your duty to consider the plight of the less fortunate among us. We are trying to build from this Summit a collective vision for the Americas - one that reaches out and connects with all peoples of the Hemisphere, especially the most vulnerable.

For too many of our citizens in the Americas, my dear friends, life is simply too harsh and unforgiving. More than 96 million citizens in Latin America and the Caribbean live in extreme poverty. Another disturbing report on youth tells us that 22 million in this Hemisphere are neither studying nor working and therefore have limited prospects. We are also aware that even before the downturn, in excess of 40% of the region's inhabitants were concerned about becoming unemployed. It is therefore very easy to imagine how that fear has multiplied during the last six months.

The overall picture is disturbing, but we cannot be discouraged by it as we plan for a better future. I believe, however, that I have said enough to impress upon you the importance of our task.

The real challenge is in developing programmes that will cater for those youth in communities across the Americas who today have reason, real or imagined, to believe that they are being marginalised by society: disappointed young people who think there is no hope; youth caught in the core of social decay, and the growing incidence of crime that has affected the stability of many countries across our Hemisphere.

We need programmes that will inspire them to creativity and involvement. We need to harness their tremendous energy by creating opportunities and incentives for them to prosper. We must make it possible for them to assume their rightful place as productive and empowered citizens of society. We must also find ways to involve our business institutions and leaders in mentoring those who may be otherwise lost. We must assure our youth of a future that is positive and meaningful.

And so, my appeal to you is to focus also on these issues in your deliberations. In so doing you would be addressing in a truly wholesome manner concerns about human prosperity in the Hemisphere.

Our decision to create a separate forum for youth was founded on the premise that you are in a unique position to make a valuable contribution to the process of this Summit. This is an important new direction and I wish you the very best outcome from your deliberations.

I now turn to members of the Private Sector Forum. Let me first acknowledge the presence in the audience of some truly outstanding leaders and captains of industry in our hemisphere. Your participation in this process gives me the assurance of a very positive outcome. I am indeed grateful that you have agreed to join us in this quest for building stronger societies for all citizens of the Americas.

I see your role as more challenging and expansive than that of the Youth Forum, although I must hasten to say, not more important. This is because the role of the private sector is directly and inextricably linked to the key constituents of the Summit theme. I refer to Human Prosperity, Energy Security and

Environmental Sustainability. The difficulty of your challenge, of course, is in having to deliver on those formidable tangibles at a time when the world's major economies are moving more deeply into recession.

Gross Domestic Product across the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is falling in the order of 5% per annum, after a similar decline in the fourth quarter of 2008. Manufacturing in exporting countries has been hit especially hard. Global trade is slumping.

In the United States and the United Kingdom for example, industrial production fell by 10% and 11% in January, compared to a year ago; in Germany and Japan, it fell by 19% and 30%.

We continue to hear of job losses every day in every major economy of the world. In the United States, regarded as the world's largest economy, job losses have climbed to more than 3.6 million since the beginning of 2008. The situation has been described as the worst in 34 years.

New risks are emerging. The Euro zone, for example, is caught between banks exposed to toxic Western capital markets, and those banks exposed to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, where repayment capacity is being increasingly diminished.

The impact of the threatening recession varies from country to country, and some of us are better equipped to respond to the challenge. For one country the drop in oil prices is welcome. For another, it represents a loss of revenue. The problem is, however, that the world has become so interdependent that no country is insulated from negative economic developments in any other part of the world.

This briefly, is the backdrop to your deliberations. Therefore ladies and gentlemen, you do have serious challenges ahead of you. The promotion of human prosperity within the Hemisphere depends on the creation of wealth by the private sector. Even as the prospects appear to be increasingly dim, your approach to this task must recognize that in every crisis there is always opportunity.

You are required to promote increased trade and competitiveness while you also develop proposals for sustainable development. You are also required to pay special attention to the economic needs of the smaller vulnerable economies. At the same time you must guide micro, small and medium-sized enterprises into becoming strategic forces.

You need to develop proposals for capacity building, the development of financial and physical infrastructure and the reinvigoration of our agricultural sectors. You are being called to help in the war on poverty and hunger; create dignified work for people of the Hemisphere; and raise standards of living through the development of business opportunity. At the same time we expect you as well to produce new ideas for energy security and environmental sustainability, since improved access and cheaper, more efficient energy will promote development of both producing and consuming countries in the Region.

A tremendous task indeed, but we have every confidence in you. After saying all this to you, you by now of course understand, that we are depending on you to deliver to Summit leaders a suite of recommendations that will make all our financial and economic problems disappear. Wouldn't that just be a great start to the Fifth Summit? What do you think?

Realistically though, such a basket of deliverables might be quite a stretch. But we are willing to settle for your very best collective effort at producing solutions for promoting private sector-led prosperity in response to our global economic and financial challenges.

As conference Chairman, I am confident that your recommendations will encourage new alliances, and lead to a renewed spirit of cooperation and solidarity in the interest of all the peoples of the Americas. I

remind you that the goal of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as the chair of this Summit is to ensure that it delivers meaningful and tangible benefits to all the people of the Americas. This overarching objective should be at the forefront of your deliberations at all times.

I truly believe that we are endowed with the resources, both human and natural, to overcome successfully the many challenges we now face in our Hemisphere. We are clearly not short of heroes. There is a reservoir of inspiration from which to draw the revitalizing energy that we always need both as individuals and nations. I therefore expect that this joint forum of youth and the private sector will further the goals of the Fifth Summit of the Americas and further enrich our hemispheric civilization.

Ladies and gentlemen I wish you every success in your deliberations and I thank you for the opportunity of addressing you.