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**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY LUIS ALBERTO RODRIGUEZ, NATIONAL
COORDINATOR FOR THE FIFTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS AND SPECIAL
ENVOY TO THE AMERICAS AT THE SECOND SUMMIT IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW
GROUP MEETING FOR 2009**

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Distinguished Delegates,

Today, we commence the sixth negotiating session on the Draft Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain. For some five months now, our focus has been on negotiating a document with clearly defined commitments that will constitute the strategic direction from our leaders for important national and hemispheric initiatives in the years ahead.

Since assuming the chairmanship of the SIRG almost two years ago, I have gleaned from my discussions with you, the representatives of the 34 democratic nations of the Americas, a fervent desire and commitment to make the Fifth Summit a resounding success for our leaders, all our nations and especially the 800 million people whose interest we collectively represent. We all seem to agree that the Fifth Summit provides us with two important opportunities.

Firstly, this Summit provides the opportunity to redefine and form new relationships among our countries and, within and among, the various sub-regions of our Hemisphere, and to strengthen cooperation and integration initiatives that are mutually beneficial. Secondly, when Trinidad and Tobago called for a concise, commitment-driven declaration, many countries affirmed their support. There was an apparent consensus that we use this opportunity to reconnect, in a meaningful way, the Summits process with the people of our Hemisphere by producing a concise and focused declaration that has tangible, measurable outcomes for our fellow citizens.

We are a mere sixty-six (66) days away from the gathering of our leaders in Port of Spain and I think that it is very important to review where we are in terms of the document that is emerging. The sad truth, distinguished colleagues and friends, is that despite our very best efforts, the hard work of all delegations and the very strong spirit of compromise that has pervaded our deliberations, the document that is emerging, after five months of negotiations, has not kept true to our original intent.

As chair of these proceedings, I have to tell you that I am very concerned that this Declaration will not advance the kind of progress we so desperately need to inspire hope and improve the quality of life of our citizens. It has lost the spirit of the theme of the Summit and the Draft Declaration, which was presented to you on July 24 last year.

Over the past months of negotiations we have at times been hesitant to assume new commitments. Indeed in some cases, it seems we may have retreated to the safety of reiterating previous commitments, and recognizing and reaffirming past decisions. In setting the future course for the Americas, there are, undoubtedly, instances when we will not all agree. Let me say here, that this Chair respects the sovereign right of each and every country here to have their views and varying positions reflected in the Declaration.

I also respect the fact that there are instances when national priorities, limited resources and capacity constraints make it difficult to be as ambitious as we would like or even as ambitious as the

expectations of our citizens require. There are also times when we may get bogged down in technical specificities. However, let us be guided by the clear and present need to refocus our development priorities and shape a collective vision for our hemisphere around those strategic actions and clearly defined targets that have a genuine chance of being pursued and implemented. And let us remember that for a document such as this, the broader vision of our Heads of State and Government is what is most important. There have been instances when countries have questioned whether the issues under consideration should fall under the purview of our Heads of State and Government or be dealt with at the Ministerial or some lower level. These questions are quite valid.

We seem inconsistent at times, retreating to previous agreements and language contained therein in some instances, while in some cases we depart from the past. Oftentimes in our effort to keep faith with previous agreements, we have not taken into consideration the fact that conditions would have changed, there may be difficulties in implementation or that more progressive targets may be now needed. As it stands now, many of measurable outcomes we seemed eager to support in principle have now disappeared from the document.

I think that there three (3) important questions that we must constantly ask ourselves for each paragraph, each sentence, each commitment.

One ... Is there any implementable action from this text?

Two ... Will it lead to any tangible and measurable progress for our citizens?

Three ... Is it most appropriate for our leaders to focus on these issues? ... especially given the range of challenges facing our hemisphere and the need for our leaders to address, in a Presidential Declaration, issues that are of highest strategic importance to the overall economic, social, cultural and political development of our nations.

There are several paragraphs in the current document that do not stand the test of these questions. Our 649 mandates of the past are ample testimony to the fact that mere words do not translate into either implementable actions or meaningful outcomes.

As I have said on previous occasions, it is the intention of this Chair to conclude negotiations on the text by the end of March. And I am confident that together we can meet this time line. But it is not simply about finishing the document. Let us challenge ourselves to re-examine the meaning and the message that our Presidents and Prime Ministers want from this Declaration.

Let me now turn to the subject of our deliberations at this Meeting. Today, and during the following four days, we begin consideration of the last three sections, that deal with the cross cutting issues of public security, democratic governance and Summit follow-up and implementation effectiveness.

Public security has always been an area of concern for the region. Crime remains one the main concerns for our citizens. Globally, 81% of all cocaine seizures occur in the Americas, and our region has over 58 million illegal drugs' users. The Caribbean has the highest murder rate in the world at an average of 30 homicides per 100,000 persons. Between 1995 and 2004, 250,000 persons were victims of human trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean; and as much as 36% of our women have been subjected to some form of violence.

We have long recognized that threats to security are multidimensional in scope and diverse in nature. The Draft Declaration addresses the complexity of the threats to security, their impact on social cohesion and democracy, and indeed on social and economic development. Terrorism, money laundering, and trafficking in drugs, arms and people, are just some of the challenges that our countries face. It is clear that the criminals who perpetrate these illicit activities, do not acknowledge national boundaries. This reinforces the need for Hemispheric cooperation, whether it be in the form of training, technical or financial assistance, or information exchange. It is in our best interest to cooperate with each other, for these threats to security affect us all.

Distinguished Delegates,

The subject of governance has also been addressed in previous Summits, and in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. The attainment of our shared vision for development is dependent on the quality of a country's governance, its democratic institutions, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

The reality is that our region still faces governance challenges today. Last year, 70% of people in Latin America believed that their government represented only the interest of a few, rather than the majority, and only 44% could say they had confidence in their government.

We know that good governance is based on the inclusion of everyone, without discrimination, and enables their full participation in society. The Draft Declaration reinforces the importance of including all people; it reiterates that democracy is essential for the development of the people of the Americas; and, it expresses our commitment to transparency, integrity, accountability and efficiency.

Distinguished Delegates,

The last section of the Draft Declaration places emphasis on implementation. I think that all countries agree that follow-up and implementation is a central issue for the Summits. The primary job of the Summit Implementation Review Group, in between Summits, is to measure and report on the implementation of Summit mandates. Many of the commitments made at the Fifth Summit will fall upon respective Ministers to implement, and report back on their progress. Institutions of the Joint Summit Working Group have their roles, through their activities and programmes, to support implementation. The Organization of American States is central to this role, as it forms the foundation of inter-American cooperation.

But our governments and institutions are not the only actors in either decision-making or in implementation, and if what we have said before about governance is to hold true, civil society and the private sector must also play their parts to effectively execute the Summit commitments and mandates. Partnership, in this regard, is of paramount importance.

In closing, let me reiterate that we have the responsibility to set the strategic direction for all our nations to advance towards greater peace, security and prosperity. Let us keep this at the forefront of our minds. Let us ensure that the document we produce does not lose the spirit and intent with which we started. We should be reminded that this Declaration of Commitment, which will be signed

by our leaders, must be effective in expressing their intent to better the lives of all the peoples of the Americas.

Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues, we have only sixty-six days until our Heads of State and Government meet in Port of Spain on April 17. It is a short time, and we still have much to accomplish. We must accelerate the pace of these deliberations ... but I want to reiterate that it is not about completing just any document. It must be a document that adds value and one that we can all be proud of. We must also be satisfied that we have faithfully met the responsibility entrusted to us to set a new course for our Americas and achieve the higher goal of securing our citizens future.

I know that this will be a long week, with a lot of hard work, and with some frustration, but in the end I know it will be rewarding.

I thank you.