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I have the honour to address this Fourth Meeting of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) in my capacity as the President of the *Inter-American Commission of Women* (CIM) for the 2006-2008 Biennium - and incidentally, CIM's Fifth President from CARICOM. As President of this august body, tasked with representing the diversity of the Americas, I am particularly pleased to note that this is the first time that the President of this *Inter-American Commission of Women* (CIM) has been afforded the opportunity to address a SIRG meeting. Consequently, on behalf of the women of the Americas, I wish to express CIM's gratitude for the hard work of the National Summits Secretariat under the inspired leadership of His Excellency Luis Alberto Rodriguez; ably assisted by the busy constellation of Summit Coordinators in the other member states. We also wish to note the wonderful symbiosis which exists between the National Summits Secretariat of Trinidad and Tobago and the OAS Summits of the Americas Secretariat. Undoubtedly, this Fourth SIRG - like those preceding it - will bear that distinctive stamp of excellence which underscores the meticulous execution of duty which has gone into making it a reality.

The Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), which I proudly represent, is the premier inter-governmental entity in the world. Moreover, it has distinguished itself by having as its overarching and unchanging mandate the promotion of women's rights - especially their human rights - and the advancement and attainment of gender equity and equality in the Americas. This year the Inter-American Commission of Women is celebrating the 80th year of its existence after being founded on February 18, 1928 for the specific purpose of winning recognition of women's civil and political rights. From this particular struggle, CIM has amplified its work since the 1950's, to address all forms of discrimination against women. CIM posits women's human rights as being central to democracy and development given that women constitute over half of the citizens of the world.

CIM's involvement with the Summit of the Americas process began at the Inaugural Summit of the Americas held in Miami, Florida in 1994. Since then its connection with the Summit process has been one of gradual evolution and steady progress. Consequently, CIM's complement of mandates from the Summit process has significantly increased as its role deepened and strengthened in the Inter-American System. The Plan of Action of the 1994 Miami Summit called for the strengthening of the CIM, in addition to the strengthening of all policies and programmes that improve and broaden the participation of women in all spheres of political, social and economic life. It also called for the strengthening and establishing, where they do not exist, national mechanisms and governmental organs focused on gender equality and equality of opportunities for men and

women and critically, that these be furnished with the requisite adequate and timely human and financial resources. The 1998 Santiago Summit and its Plan of Action reiterated the recommendations of the First Summit and urged governments to implement and follow-up on the commitments made at the Summits of the Americas regarding the status of women.

A breakthrough year for the CIM came, however, with the Third Summit of the Americas, held in 2001 in Quebec, Canada. This Summit's Plan of Action, underscoring CIM's role as technical advisor to the SIRG, recognised, reinforced and strengthened the work of the CIM. A notable achievement was greater visibility given to the integration of a gender perspective where ultimately member states endorsed of the *'Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality'* (IAP) which had been adopted at the First Meeting of Ministers or of the Highest-Ranking Authorities Responsible for the Advancement of Women (REMIM) as an effective tool for gender mainstreaming. REMIM, which is convoked every four years, is primarily for the preparation and follow-up work for the Summits of the Americas. So, the IAP which had been approved at the First REMIM, identified the integration of a gender perspective as a decisive strategy to promote and protect women's human rights and gender equality. When the Third Summit adopted the IAP, a quantum leap was given to the work of the CIM for this meant that for the first time the gender perspective was included throughout the Plan of Action of that Summit. Moreover, there was a special chapter on gender equality and the gender perspective was incorporated into the Ministerials on Labour, Justice and Education. Therefore, the will to cross-cut gender into the summits process became actualised and institutionalised at this watershed Third Summit of the Americas.

In 2004, at the Special Summit of the Americas, held in Monterrey, Mexico, member states affirmed their commitment to the mandates of the Summits of the Americas which addressed the empowerment of women, their full and equal participation in the development of our societies and their equal opportunities to exercise leadership. The member states were of one accord that the promotion of gender equality and equity was fundamental to the reduction of poverty, the promotion of economic and social prosperity, and for people-centered sustainable development.

The Fourth Summit of the Americas held in Mar de Plata, Argentina, zoned in on decent work, i.e, productive work which is dignified and adequately remunerated, as being central to achieving advancement in the peoples of the hemisphere. In its 2005 Plan of Action, commitments were made to eliminate discrimination against women primarily through the implementation of a range of policies to increase women's access to decent work. It also addressed the issue of equality of access for men and women to the benefits of social protection and called for paying attention to the gender differentials in labour and social policies.

CIM recognises the tremendous importance attached to this historical Fifth Summit of the Americas, where it will be the first time that a Summit of the Americas is being held in a CARICOM member state since that inaugural Miami Summit of the Americas in 1994. Therefore, we applaud the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for its pioneering spirit in undertaking to host this historical Fifth Summit of Americas. CARICOM is truly making strides in the hemisphere where as a geopolitically smaller sub-region it can rise to gigantic challenges with the faith that its widow's mite can produce groundbreaking results in the hemisphere. Already there is bold promise couched in the Fifth Summits' engaging theme of: ***"Securing our Citizens' Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability."***

CIM is excited by the possibilities in operating beyond the box of former Summits where this outcome document marks a departure from the customary Declarations and accompanying Plans of Action. This Fifth Summit has embarked on creating a document with a difference - a Declaration of Commitment - which essentially is a hybrid document crafted for 'embodying a collaborative and collective response to the challenges of the Hemisphere' and as such, aiming for 'a more focused, integrated, results-oriented approach to addressing these challenges'.

In fact, at the last SIRG Meeting held in Barbados on September 18-19, 2008, Hon. Donville Inniss, Minister of State in the Barbadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and International Business astutely observed that while the challenge to delegates would be 'to craft a document which...is relevant to the challenges of today' that this document has to be "geared towards the hemisphere's aspirations for the future".

We, as the principal hemispheric body for generating policy for the advancement of the human rights of women and particularly of gender equality and equity, believe that this Fifth Summit can truly make a difference in the lives of the peoples of this hemisphere, especially those who are the most vulnerable. As the 34 member states assemble in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on April 17-19, 2009, we have yet another chance to make a choice for change. Summit after Summit, we acknowledge that democracy and development are stymied if the advancement of women and girls at all levels of society falls short. However, with this Declaration of Port of Spain committed to tangibles and deliverables, we have to ensure that member states are held accountable for embedding the gender perspective as the fulcrum of all national, sub-regional and hemispheric policies and programmes. To maximize this commitment, it is imperative that the strengthening of national machineries for the advancement of women and the attainment of gender equity and equity, is given top priority.

Delegates, you have a unique opportunity with such a people-centered theme for the Fifth Summit to shape a new Americas. Therefore, I challenge you, as you draft that brave, new 'streamlined and action-oriented' document of commitment to reflect the hemisphere's approach to addressing the challenges of democracy, crime, energy, security and sustainable development, to craft a document which is not only fully engendered, but done in a tangible and deliverable way to highlight a genuine commitment to gender equilibrium.

In closing, I wish to reiterate my gratitude to you for allowing CIM a voice at this Fourth SIRG Meeting. We wish you much success in the continued negotiations of this important document which will provide the necessary architectural plan for the Americas for the next few years upon which our governments will refurbish; even rebuild; the existing social, cultural economic and political structures of the hemisphere - in an environment which faces many social, economic and political and environmental challenges, threats and uncertainty.

CIM strongly believes that there is much relevance and value in the Summit process. Yet, it must remain strongly and uncompromisingly committed to realizing the value-added of fully embedding and maintaining a gender perspective within the work of the Summit as a tool for overcoming one manifestation of exclusion and marginalisation.

To that end, the Third Meeting of Ministers and Highest-Ranking Authorities Responsible for the Advancement of Women in the Member States (REMIM) will be held in Santiago, Chile on November 13, 2008; immediately following the three-day 34th Assembly of Delegates of the

Commission. The main item on our agenda will be consideration of the Draft Declaration of Port of Spain with a view to feeding into the Summit process by incorporating a gender lens into the outcome document.

This Fourth SIRG meeting which occurs prior to our REMIM, can greatly enrich the work of REMIM III by utilising this window of opportunity to enhance the Declaration of Port of Spain with an even more robust commitment to gender equity and equality - especially in areas related to education, health, climate change, science and technology, economic empowerment. For as this Summit looks to overcoming poverty which continues to be a major challenge for most of the hemisphere, allow me to emphasise that the growing feminization of poverty means that women - especially those who head families and care for dependents - are the poorest of the poor.

It is of utmost importance, therefore, that the Declaration of Commitment emanating from the Fifth Summit of the Americas must be thoroughly cross-cut with the gender perspective, so as not to undercut the aspirations; so as not to underplay the importance; or not to undermine the empowerment and prosperity of any woman of the Americas.

I thank you.