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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 FOURTH SUMMIT IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW GROUP
MEETING FOR 2008

Honourable Minister, Distinguished National Summit Coordinators, Other Distinguished Delegates and Representatives of our Regional Institutions and the Media.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I must thank the Government of Antigua and Barbuda for hosting this Fourth Regular Meeting of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) for 2008. It has been my pleasure to work with my colleague and friend, the National Coordinator of Antigua and Barbuda and with the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the arrangements for this Meeting.

As I said in Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago is very appreciative of the strong support we continue to receive from our CARICOM partners in the preparations for the Fifth Summit of the Americas. In keeping with the vision of Prime Minister Manning, the Fifth Summit must have the character of "a CARICOM event" that provides the opportunity for our sub-region to lead the process of shaping a new inter-american agenda that is based on greater cooperation, integration and solidarity with the other sub-regions of our Hemisphere. Indeed, I perceive that it is in keeping with this spirit of regional integration and partnership, that the Government of Antigua and Barbuda has come forward to be host of these important deliberations.

Honourable Minister, through you, I would like to convey our deepest sentiments of gratitude to Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer and the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda for partnering with Trinidad and Tobago in this effort.

At the onset, I would also like to place on record, our appreciation for the excellent and constructive comments provided by Member States on the Draft Declaration of Commitment. It is clear that we share a lot of common ground and your contributions have served to enrich the document. It was also very apparent to us at the National Secretariat that the varied perspectives presented were all driven by a shared intent to ensure that the interest of all the peoples of the Americas are served in meaningful and tangible ways.

I am very optimistic that this shared intent will continue to drive the spirit of cooperation, compromise and consensus building that has been evident throughout our deliberations thus far, and which will become increasingly important to reconciling the different viewpoints that will no doubt arise as we move forward. In forging ahead with these negotiations, we must continue to be

pragmatic and responsive to the fact that there are differences in the levels of development, institutional capacity and in the political, economic and social systems among our countries. Our goal should be to build consensus on commitments that are feasible, taking into account the circumstances in each of our countries, and which will coalesce to form a strong platform for sustainable growth and development in the Americas and in the decades ahead.

In drafting the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain that was presented to Member States on July 24 this year, Trinidad and Tobago was driven by the need to deliver tangible and measurable outcomes for all our citizens. We also underscored the importance of having an integrated set of strategies and actions in order to maximize and sustain progress.

In our consultations with Member States and institutions, there was a pervasive sense of support for this approach. As we continue our work today and in the months ahead, we must not lose this focus. As far as is possible, we must work towards setting targets and timelines for their achievement to drive the implementation that we all agree has been less desirable thus far. We must also strive to ensure policy consistency so that action in any one area also advances progress in another.

If we are not successful in these efforts, we will lose the opportunity to have the meaningful impact that we all seem to agree is much needed and much deserved by the people of the Americas. I daresay as well that we will lose the opportunity to restore credibility to a process that provides the only forum for all leaders of the democratic nations of the Americas to meet, consult on important issues and advance joint responses.

Distinguished Delegates, with tenuous conditions in the global economy today, the urgency of concerted hemispheric action has acquired even greater dimensions. The past 14 years of inter-American summitry has provided a good platform for action. Let us forge ahead on the basis of our common goals and aspirations for the people of our Hemisphere. In this effort, our institutions have a critical role to play in providing advice and supporting implementation.

In closing, let me say that the National Summit Secretariat is committed to working with all Member States and institutions to bring this process to a successful conclusion. We are also very mindful of the very important contributions that civil society and other Summit actors can make to this process and will endeavour to bring forward those perspectives for the consideration of Member States.

Honourable Minister, I thank you once again for being here and on behalf of all the delegates I want to say how truly appreciative we all are for the very generous hospitality that is being extended by the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda.

I thank you.