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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 THIRD SUMMIT IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW
GROUP MEETING FOR 2009**

(Remarks delivered on February 23, 2009)

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

WASHINGTON DC, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA – FEBRUARY 23, 2009

Distinguished Delegates

My remarks to you this morning will be brief so that we can begin our deliberations as soon as possible.

Today we begin our seventh negotiating session on the Draft Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain. Over the last six months we have spent many hours together negotiating this document, which will represent an agreement among our leaders - an articulation of their vision for our hemisphere in the coming years and the strategic actions that they commit to undertake to realize that vision.

I recalled, at our last meeting, that those many months ago, when Trinidad and Tobago called for a concise, commitment-driven declaration, many countries agreed with this approach and supported the idea of the Declaration of Commitment. We called for the need to reconnect the Summits, in a meaningful way, to the people of our hemisphere by producing a focused declaration with tangible, measurable outcomes for all.

However, as I also pointed out at our last meeting, it seems that the document that is emerging does not reflect that original intent.

There is no doubt that we have made progress. At our last meeting, we approved 13 paragraphs, the single largest number of paragraphs approved at any of our meetings. However, it took us five days to do that, and of those 13 paragraphs approved, four were completely new. The approvals are important, but it is unfortunate that along the way we are losing the strength of the document, losing the commitments, and losing the targets, in spite of the best efforts of us all.

Our Draft Declaration started out with 66 paragraphs, it has so far swollen to approximately 95 paragraphs, inclusive of approved, pending and paragraphs still to be read. Many of the mandates and

targets have simply disappeared. Indeed, we have several approved paragraphs in this Declaration, which after hours of discussion in the Plenary, quite frankly, have little substance in terms of concrete actions to be taken and measureable results to be gained.

Let us remind ourselves again, that this document is a statement by our Heads of State and Government, and in doing so let us ask ourselves, again, these questions about each paragraph, each sentence, and each commitment:

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

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

Three...Is it appropriate for our Leaders to focus on these issues in a presidential declaration, ...or should they not focus on the issues that are of highest strategic importance to the overall economic, social, cultural and political development of our nations?

And, finally I want to add...do our leaders, who answer to the people of the Americas, want to sign a document that does not connect with and respond to the realities of their daily lives in a clear and definitive way? A document that does not inspire hope that real change is happening now.

Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues, Friends,

The diversity among our nations is one that we should indeed be proud of. Our countries differ in physical size, population, economic development, language, religion, ethnicity and the list goes on. But within all this diversity, there lies a common desire to improve our nations, to the best of our ability ... to make our Americas fertile ground for greater human prosperity.

There are many examples of this. Almost all of our nations are affected by the recent economic slowdown. The global financial crisis has touched us in different ways. In some countries it is the housing market that has been most affected, in others it is job losses, decreased demand for commodities and associated revenue losses. Whatever the effect, these present challenges are deciding factors to our citizens' ability to progress and in many cases to survive.

Some of us are net energy producers, some of us are net energy importers, but we all want energy security. We all want sustainable, safer, greener energy sources, whether they be derived from traditional fossil fuels or alternatives.

Climate change will affect us all differently as well, because of our differing geographies. We have some of the largest countries in the world, and some of the smallest. We have small island states and we have landlocked states. Some of us are obviously more at risk than others, but the fact remains that as climate change accelerates, all our peoples will be affected.

Some of our countries elect their Presidents directly, some of us have parliamentary systems. Many of us are Republics while some have a monarch serving as Head of State. But, the commonality is that we are all democracies. Our leaders, therefore, have a responsibility to answer to the people.

Distinguished Delegates

It is within these common grounds that consensus can be forged. We cannot address every single issue that is particular to one or a few countries, or even a sub-region. If we attempt to do so our Draft Declaration will become unwieldy, unmanageable and perhaps always incomplete. We will just be adding to the existing 649 mandates without really being effective.

Let us look at our priorities and the challenges that we can tackle together and the action that we must agree on in the Summit if we are to really make a difference to the people of our countries.

Remember, this is a Declaration of Commitment to key actions that will catalyse further action at the Ministerial and sector levels. It cannot and should not be an inventory of all issues, at least not without any tangible, implementable actions attached.

We have approved 42 paragraphs in almost six months. We have five weeks, including this one, to finalise the remaining 53.

Let us focus on those strategic actions and clearly defined goals that have a genuine chance of being pursued and implemented. Our Hemisphere and our people expect and deserve nothing less.

Thank You.