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**Statement by the Honorable Paula Gopee-Scoon, Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Ministers, Heads of Delegation and National Summit Coordinators,

Distinguished Delegates,

It gives me great pleasure to begin my remarks today by announcing to you and the people of our Hemisphere that the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has taken the decision that the Fifth Summit of the Americas will take place in the heart of our capital city of Port of Spain over the period April 17-19, 2009.

The Fifth Summit of the Americas, the theme of which is “Securing Our Citizens’ Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability” comes at a very critical time in the development process of our region.

After years of instability and stagnation, the region is now showing very promising signs of progress. In the last five years, most economies have continued to expand rapidly, driven mainly by private consumption and gross capital formation. Despite considerable volatility in financial markets in the latter half of the year, the region, according to ECLAC, recorded growth of 5.7% for 2007, the fifth consecutive year of economic expansion.

However, this rate of progress has been quite uneven across the region and we must not lose sight of those who continue to be peripheral to the development process. That there are still 190 million people living in poverty with 70 million of those people being indigent and facing hunger should be enough to fire our determination to do and achieve much more.

The region has also made remarkable strides in the area of governance on the basis of which we continue to build stronger democracies. One cannot risk complacency in this area for, as I indicated at the Summit Implementation Review Group Meeting in Tobago in February earlier this year, “*the efforts to maintain our stable democracies cannot be taken for granted in the midst of unpredictable externalities*”.

Today, the threat of economic slowdown, occasioned by a multiplicity of factors can place the gains we have made in serious jeopardy. Although, growth is projected to continue in 2008,

instability in financial markets and the risk of contagion from financial crises have increased and a slowdown in world trade will have a negative impact on exports from our region. Moreover, rising energy and food prices increase the threat of inflation while the climate change phenomenon has already begun to make the situation even more precarious. According to the Inter-American Development Bank, escalating food prices now pose the threat of sending some 26 million more people into poverty in the Hemisphere.

It is within this context, that we must see the heightened importance of the Fifth Summit. As it stands today, the Summit of the Americas remains the only forum in which the 34 democratically elected leaders of our Hemisphere all come together to discuss the development priorities of our region and to agree on collective responses to the challenges facing our people.

It is our responsibility to take the decisions and actions to reduce and eventually eliminate the debilitating condition of poverty. The persistence of poverty and inequality in some countries has, no doubt, contributed to the level of crime and violence. In fact crime and security have emerged as singularly urgent challenges to the peace and stability of our Hemisphere. It is important that we intensify our collaboration in this area to effectively deal with this menace which not only inflicts fear and insecurity on our people but can have a corrosive influence on important institutions in our region and affects investment, innovation and competitiveness; and ultimately growth.

We must strike a balance between economic growth, social progress and environmental sustainability. Success in any one area is not enough. Progress hinges, also, on how we harness and train our valuable human resources. Access to the best possible health care is also an essential component of development. Affordable housing, sustainable communities, and facilities for sport, recreation and cultural development must also be placed in the forefront of efforts for the improvement of our human resource, the promotion of social cohesion and ultimately, strengthened democracies.

We live in a time when critical decisions must be taken on the issues of energy and the environment. The Fifth Summit must provide the platform for collective action on these issues, especially as they relate to the vulnerabilities of nations of the Hemisphere. Acting alone will not bring the desired results.

There is also now the need to address the growing, global problem of feeding our people. Our efforts must focus on increasing access to affordable food, especially for the poorest in our societies.

Distinguished Colleagues, these issues have been analysed and spoken about at length, and it seems that we all agree that we need to act; decisively, quickly and in unison. We must use the opportunity next year in April at the Summit to send a strong message that as a region we are ready to take the bold steps that are necessary.

On April 9, 2008, I presented to our Member States at a Special Session of the Permanent Council, the Concept Paper for the Summit which outlines the key issues and strategic initiatives being put forward by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and the views and perspectives articulated by your countries, our regional institutions and representatives of the region's citizenry. I must thank all Member States, the Joint Summit Working Group and the other Summit actors who

freely shared their ideas and concerns with us. Your input has made the Concept Paper one in which together we can all legitimately claim ownership.

The consultative process has been a defining feature of our preparations for the Fifth Summit. There has been an unrivalled spirit of cooperation and a growing solidarity on the need to address these very important issues in bold and definitive ways. We believe that this is absolutely essential if we are to strengthen the connection between the Summit process and the welfare of the people whom we serve.

To date, the National Secretariat has conducted missions to several member states to share the vision that we have for our Hemisphere and the approach we have adopted, as host of the Fifth Summit. We have also listened carefully to your views on the issues that are important to you and the approaches you would like to see adopted. It is our intention to continue the engagement with Member States in the upcoming months.

The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago has reiterated on a number of occasions that he sees Trinidad and Tobago's involvement in the Fifth Summit as a Caribbean effort. We continue to embrace all of CARICOM in the preparations for the Summit and in consultation with our regional partners, including the CARICOM Secretariat, we will ensure that Caribbean concerns are integrated into the deliberations of the Summit.

Distinguished Delegates, Trinidad and Tobago favours a strengthening of the role of civil society and the private sector in the Summits Process.

At the Civil Society Hemispheric Forum which took place in Miami over a two day period at the beginning of May, there were as many as 117 participants drawn from 27 countries across of the region. Strong calls were made for continued strengthening of democratic institutions and the promotion of mechanisms to facilitate the participation of all peoples, especially groups that have been traditionally marginalized, in the development of policies and programmes at the national and hemispheric levels.

There was also fervent support for the monitoring and follow-up of public policies, especially those in the area of education and health care, to ensure that the intended impact on the targeted populations is realised.

The Forum reiterated the need for policies that promote sustained economic growth with equity and social justice; policies that encourage the development of, and universal access to, energy efficient, environmentally friendly technologies; and policies that support the establishment of transparent legal and regulatory frameworks.

Many civil society representatives also suggested that our efforts should not be expended on identifying new mandates. Instead, the priority should be to translate past Summit mandates into specific, realistic, measurable and enforceable policies.

Many of these views were reinforced at the dialogue with civil society groups yesterday.

Distinguished Delegates, Trinidad and Tobago has articulated the need to depart slightly from the past and produce one outcome document - a Declaration of Commitment.

After 65 themes and 649 mandates, I daresay that we don't need a general, broad brushed, normative declaration. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is of the view that, as far as is possible, we must set out very specific measures that can make a real difference in the years ahead.

For every commitment we draft and negotiate, the pertinent questions must be "What real, tangible benefit will this measure bring?" This is the thought provoking question that must be contemplated.

The Declaration will take the format of identifying for each issue contained in the Concept Paper, a **Declarative Statement** which identifies the specific challenge or priority, followed by a **Resolution Statement** which describes the way in which the problem should be addressed and a **Mandate Statement** which outlines the commitment to specific targets and to the actions to meet those targets.

Recognising that it will be difficult to set very specific targets for some important areas such as the environment, the Fifth Summit must reinforce existing commitments and strengthen our resolve to work towards future international agreements such as those being developed under the 'Bali Road Map'.

Distinguished Delegates, I am pleased to advise that work on the drafting of the Declaration of Commitment is well underway. The Joint Summit Working Group has agreed to provide information on the goals, targets, strategies, and activities which each institution intends to focus on in the coming years. This information is integral to the development of tangible and measurable targets for the Declaration and the strengthening of implementation and follow-up of mandates. We look forward to receiving this information as early as possible.

We cannot miss this opportunity now to put in place more efficient arrangements for follow-up and implementation. It is very important that the OAS focus on this core issue to ensure that the Summit Process delivers real and lasting results.

As we move to build on the successes of recent years, the role of our regional institutions becomes even more paramount. Capable, transparent, accountable and trusted institutions are the main vehicles for promoting human prosperity, and sustainable development in the Americas with greater co-ordination among these institutions to ensure more efficient allocation of resources and to maximize the impact of their collective interventions. We must also place equal attention on strengthening our national institutions and bringing our Ministers of Finance more intimately into the fold of the Summit Process.

In terms of the way ahead, over the next six months, we plan to convene five meetings of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) to advance the negotiations on the Declaration. The majority of these meetings will take place in the Caribbean. We are also quite keen to continue the dialogue with the various Summit stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector.

The Declaration of Commitment will be presented to Member States in the early summer which will facilitate the start of negotiations in mid-September.

In respect of logistical arrangements, work is also well-advanced under the guidance of a Ministerial Steering Committee. We are also formulating comprehensive security, logistics,

accommodation and transportation plans, many elements of which will move into full-scale execution in the coming months.

I expect that we will be ready to receive any advanced visits from your countries later on this year.

Distinguished Delegates, in closing, I want to acknowledge the outstanding work being undertaken by the National Summit Secretariat, under the experienced guidance of Trinidad and Tobago's National Coordinator and Special Envoy to the Americas.

I also want to acknowledge the support we have received from the OAS General Secretariat. As I have said previously in Tobago, the unwavering engagement of the OAS remains vital to the Summits of the Americas and is the natural channel through which the Hemisphere's development objectives must be coordinated.

Distinguished Delegates, the Government and people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago are honoured to host the Fifth Summit of the Americas and we look forward to working with all Member States and regional institutions to make peace, prosperity and security in the Americas real in our time.

I thank you.