

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES



Remarks

by

Ambassador Albert R. Ramdin

Assistant Secretary General

at

Opening Ceremony

41st Meeting of the Summit Implementation Review Group

Hilton Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago

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Ambassador Luis Alberto Rodriguez, National Coordinator and Special Envoy to the Americas of Trinidad and Tobago, and Chairman of the 41st Meeting of the Summit Implementation Review Group

Distinguished National Coordinators and Representatives of Member States

Distinguished Representatives of the partner institutions of the Joint Summit Working Group

Distinguished Delegates

Colleagues from the Organization of American States

Members of the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I want to express at the outset on behalf of the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States my deep appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for offering to host the Fifth Summit of the Americas.

My pleasure at being here today is all the greater in the knowledge that this will be the first Summit of the Americas to be held in the Caribbean. Apart from the historical and cultural resonance of this fact, and the particularly Caribbean spirit, which will undoubtedly imbue the Fifth Summit, I expect that the Summit will provide a golden opportunity to focus on issues specific to the small developing states of the Caribbean sub-region, and by extension, those of the small economies of Central America. It is a historic opportunity for Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean as a whole to demonstrate their readiness and commitment to play an even more central role in the development of the hemispheric agenda,

bringing their own unique perspectives and abilities to bear on the Summits process. I therefore pay tribute to the vision and leadership of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the Hon. Patrick Manning.

The Fifth Summit is, of course, a hemispheric Summit and it will be all-embracing in scope and must also be, of necessity, all-inclusive in approach. I have no doubt that every Member State will play its part and that every partner institution will play its part in the process to accompany the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago in the delivery of a successful Summit.

I thank the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for all that it has done so far and I would especially like to acknowledge the efforts of my good friend, Ambassador Luis Alberto Rodriguez, to advance an approach based on transparent and extensive consultations in many capitals and regional secretariats.

We cannot but recognize that since the First Summit of the Americas in 1994, much has changed in our region. We have seen in the past two years alone a reaffirmation of the democratic will of the peoples of the Americas in over twenty electoral processes. Indeed, almost two thirds of the peoples of the Americas have been involved in some form in the fundamental exercise of either re-electing their executive authorities or placing new executives in power.

We have also observed that most of the elections have taken place in a relatively peaceful environment and that outcomes have been respected and accepted. This is a good sign for the further strengthening of democracy and democratic institutions in the Americas.

No doubt the process of further strengthening democracy, the rule of law, human rights and democratic governance needs to continue, but I believe a platform now exists upon which we can build.

The new political landscape in the Western Hemisphere has created also a very interesting dynamic of inter-state relations. Newly elected leaders have added new views and perspectives on how they prefer to organize and structure their economies and societies, as well as the relationships among the member states of the OAS, which continues to be the prime political forum in the Hemisphere for discussion, debate and consensus building on matters of mutual interest.

Now, it seems that the member states of the Organization of American States have decided to change direction with regard to economic cooperation and we note that bilateral trading arrangements are the main structures for facilitating trade.

While economic performance in the Americas has improved and relative growth has been realized, we still grapple with major challenges in terms of poverty, inequality and social exclusion, security, organized crime and illegal drug trafficking, and climate change and natural disasters, among many others.

I am sure that you will all agree that we cannot afford to ignore the statistics which tell us that some 25% of the population (that is approximately 220 million people, mostly young and/or female) live in unacceptable conditions, with some 90 million people having to survive on one US dollar or less a day.

Nor can we ignore the difficulties encountered by the youth at large to be provided the opportunity to become good citizens with a regular job, steady income, education, recreation and a peaceful and safe living and working environment.

The Preliminary Concept Paper on the theme, “Securing our Citizens Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability”, presented to member states and the supporting institutions,

provides a sound analysis of the current challenges facing the peoples of the Americas and provides in our view a basis for further discussion.

This meeting marks the first time that member states are gathered together, as the SIRG, to discuss the theme of and preparations for the Fifth Summit. I look forward to the refinement of the Concept Paper, inclusive of the suggestions, proposals and contributions of the member states and partner institutions. I know that the host country can count on the cooperation of all in the elaboration of the final documents that will emanate from the Fifth Summit.

I am well aware that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is concerned that, in helping to establish a new agenda for the Americas, the Fifth Summit should be results-driven and people-centred, and that it should make a real difference in the lives of the peoples of the Americas. I also know that Ambassador Rodriguez has stated the need to address the capacity of our institutions at both the hemispheric and national levels to drive and support such an agenda and the Concept Paper makes specific reference to this imperative.

I fully agree that the deliberations in the lead up to the Summit should focus on clear implementation and financing mechanisms for the mandates given by our Heads of State and Government. In this regard I see the need for a consultative process at three levels: at the national level, between Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Ministries of Finance, supported by sectoral ministries and national specialized agencies; at the hemispheric level, through a process of collaboration among regional and sub-regional entities and integration systems; and at the level of the inter-American institutions, in terms of their strategic agenda, programming and funding mechanisms. It is of critical importance to align these levels of execution to achieve the best results.

I take this opportunity to thank the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and Ambassador Luis Albert Rodriguez and his hard-working staff at the National Secretariat for the arrangements to convene this SIRG meeting in these beautiful surroundings. I do hope that they will not distract delegates from the hard work to be carried out over the next two days.

I also thank the eleven partner institutions, which along with the OAS comprise the Joint Summit Working Group, for their support and involvement so far. I believe that I speak for all when I say that the host country can continue counting on our full support, assistance and expertise, both collectively and individually. It is my pleasure to reaffirm in the strongest terms the willingness and readiness of the OAS General Secretariat to collaborate with the host country and the SIRG to provide all assistance that is required. In this respect, I am pleased to announce the appointment of Mr. David Morris as the new Director of the Summits of the Americas Secretariat in the OAS General Secretariat and Dr. Riyad Insanally as the new OAS Representative in Port of Spain, as of April 1, 2008.

This and subsequent meetings will have to contribute to the integrity and credibility of the Summit of the Americas as a forum for meaningful political consultations, as well as a mechanism to improve the well-being of the citizens of the Americas. The Fifth Summit must continue the process of building trust and confidence, as well as contribute to the strengthening of collective action and cooperation among the member states of the Organization of American States.

I thank you and wish you a successful meeting as we prepare for Port of Spain 2009.