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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 FIFTH SUMMIT IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW GROUP MEETING FOR 2008

WASHINGTON, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA – NOVEMBER. 17, 2008

Distinguished Delegates, the negotiations on the Draft Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain have now considered the first fifteen paragraphs of the document. We begin today's proceedings with 6 paragraphs having been approved by Member States after extensive dialogue at the Fourth SIRG meeting in Antigua and Barbuda. At that meeting, we also left pending for further consideration, at this meeting, nine other paragraphs.

The temporary interruption of the Fourth Meeting due to the passage of Hurricane Omar, which severely affected Antigua and Barbuda's agricultural sector and affected the lives of her citizens was a potent reminder of the vulnerabilities of many of our countries and the challenges faced by so many of our people.

If nothing else, it should have heightened the importance of the work in which we are currently engaged and the need to find practicable responses that address the challenges of human prosperity, energy security and environmental sustainability in immediate and tangible ways.

The Draft Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain gives us the platform for building consensus on how to address some of these challenges, a roadmap to guide us in deciding where to focus our efforts and limited

resources. In setting the course, there will undoubtedly be instances when we will not all agree. Instances where national priorities, limited resources and capacity constraints make it difficult to be as ambitious as we would like to be or the expectations of our citizens require.

The Draft Declaration contains measurable targets with dates for completion that will solidify our leader's and our nations' commitment. Setting targets and assigning responsibilities will assist in the fundamental purpose of the Fifth Summit, indeed, of all such gatherings: the improvement of the lives of all our peoples.

Consensus among the nations of the Americas in defining these objectives and concrete ways forward must continue to guide our negotiations over the next three days and in the months ahead. We must endeavour to ensure that the document we produce does not lose the spirit of intent that is so necessary now.

Our region, and indeed the entire world, is now in a period of transition. Major economies now face weakening economic conditions with adverse consequences for social progress looming on the horizon, there are - some would say - sweeping changes in the political landscape, our climate is changing, the demand on limited resources is growing and our societies are evolving in dramatic ways. The agreements reached at the Fifth Summit must factor in these transformations. In some instances, our responses must be more progressive and a clear departure from the past.

We all recognize that our region is markedly different from the one that existed at the time of the First Summit in 1994 and all subsequent Summits thus far. Governments have changed in most countries, with new leaders and new perspectives on their own development. Differences among the nations of the Americas are just as diverse as they were before, perhaps even more so. Our economies are also evolving with changes in the global balance of wealth and production. Increasingly, we look to the Far East for trade and investment, we also see our neighbours in a new light as potential partners and an untapped market, diversifying our export markets not only in terms of goods and services but also in terms of their geographical location.

The current economic crisis may deepen existing vulnerabilities in our countries or expose new ones. The effects are already being felt within the region through declining remittances and falling demand for exports. Weak demand for commodities will translate into lower prices, upon which so many of our countries depend. But now is not the time to insulate ourselves by isolation. It is an opportunity to do just the opposite.

Of course different countries will experience different impacts. Some will see their main export market shrink with weakening demand from countries facing difficulties, while those who have emerging market customers will still have strong exports. Others may see respite in falling energy prices, while others may see lost revenue.

The economic outlook for the region will be good for some, serious for others.

These challenges will of course give added meaning and a new level of substance to the first pillar of our theme: “Human Prosperity”. Reaching consensus on the actions we need to take and renewing the thrust toward greater implementation effectiveness are now critical outputs of this multilateral process.

The Fifth Summit of Americas presents the opportunity to set a new course in the midst of global transitions. Our leaders, some of them having never participated in such a forum will have the opportunity in April 2009 to build new alliances, renew old friendships and to take the first steps together in “a renewed spirit of cooperation, integration and solidarity” in the interest of all the peoples of the Americas.

As we work over the coming days, let us be guided by the clear and present need to refocus our development priorities and shape, as far as is possible, a collective vision for our Region that has a real chance of becoming a reality by placing a much needed focus on implementation. We have been given the responsibility to set the course for a more dynamic Americas in the global community and to create a strategic direction for all our nations to advance toward greater peace, security and prosperity. Let us not lose sight of this fact.

Distinguished delegates, in closing let me say that the National Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago stands ready to work with all Member States and institutions to make this process a successful one. Your contributions are vital to this process. We continue to carefully consider all the written comments you send us, we are here to

listen to your views and positions and we are committed to playing our part in finding the common ground on which we all can agree.

I take the opportunity to thank all Member States for their contributions and the spirit of cooperation that has pervaded these negotiations.

Distinguished Delegates, I trust that the next three days will be a productive period, with discussion and deliberation leading to agreement and consensus consistent with the spirit of having a people focused, action oriented and results driven agenda for our Americas.

I thank you.