



CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN THE SUMMITS
OF THE AMERICAS PROCESS
Sub Regional Civil Society Forum
October 30 - 31, 2008
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

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REMARKS DELIVERED BY THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

(October 31, 2008 - Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago)

**REMARKS DELIVERED BY
THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**CARIBBEAN SUB-REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM IN PREPARATION FOR THE
FIFTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS, PORT OF SPAIN,
OCTOBER 30 - NOVEMBER 1, 2008**

- Ambassador Albert Ramdhin, Assistant Secretary General of the Organisation of American States (OAS)
- Dr. Riyad Insanally, OAS Resident Representative
- Mr. Arthur Gray, Advisor, National Summit Secretariat
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Mr. David Morris, Director of the OAS Summits of the Americas Secretariat
- Ms. Hazel Brown, Coordinator, Network of NGOs of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women
- Representatives of FOCAL – the Canadian Foundation of the Americas
- Representatives of Civil Society
- Representatives of Member States of the OAS
- Distinguished Moderators
- Members of the Media
- Other Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me first begin by conveying my apologies for not being able to be with you yesterday at the opening of this invaluable forum, as originally planned, but this was due to our weekly Cabinet meetings.

It is indeed a pleasure to join you today to share my thoughts with you as you continue your discussions on the draft Declaration of Commitment to be adopted by Heads of State and Government at the Fifth Summit of the Americas in April 2009 here in Port of Spain. I am heartened to note the wide representation of civil society organizations and particularly delighted to welcome

our Caribbean colleagues who wish to add their voices to discussions which are critical to the development and future of the Hemisphere.

I wish to recognize, at the onset, the collective efforts of the Summits of the Americas Secretariat and the Department of International Affairs of the Organization of American States, the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) and the Network of NGOs of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women in organizing this Forum in collaboration with the National Summit Secretariat of Trinidad and Tobago. I wish to acknowledge as well the financial support received from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Inter-American Foundation (IAF). The convening of this Forum is yet another recognition that civil society must be engaged to augment the Summits process. You are the collective voices and agents of our peoples, providing the conduit for consultation on issues that affect the very social fabric of each of our societies.

As host of the Fifth Summit of the Americas in 2009 under the theme “Securing Our Citizens’ Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability”, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been committed to engaging fully civil society. As the strongest proponent of Summit reform, your expertise and recommendations are vital to the Inter-American agenda in order to advance Summit implementation. Civil society **must** therefore be seen as a constructive partner in helping to implement Summit mandates both for the Organisation of American States (OAS) and Governments. This Forum, then, is a continuum of a process which from the start has stressed the engagement of all stakeholders in decisions that will ultimately shape, impact and influence the lives of each citizen in the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas.

Trinidad and Tobago, through its National Summit Secretariat in collaboration with the OAS Summits Secretariat, was pleased to convene the Hemispheric Forum with Civil Society in May this year (1st and 2nd) in Miami. Recommendations at that Forum from some 117 representatives of civil society organizations around the Americas, highlighted specific proposals on energy security; human development and poverty reduction; and economic development and competitiveness. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago was pleased to receive the recommendations from the Miami Forum which were taken into consideration in the preparation of the draft Declaration of Commitment which you are now in the process of reviewing.

I was also pleased to learn of the Caribbean Sub-Regional Dialogue For the Participation of Young People in the Process of the Summits of the Americas held two days ago with the purpose of achieving greater participation among young people in the Caribbean in the Young Americas Forum. As a nation, Trinidad and Tobago recognises the importance of involving young people at all stages of the democratic process. We continue to foster their inclusion through several of our policy initiatives and the implementation of related critical programmes geared to their collective well-being. I therefore wish to commend the efforts of the Young Americas Business Trust (YABT), the OAS Summits of the Americas Secretariat and the National Secretariat for convening the Dialogue. In so doing, our young people – our most principal resource - in the Caribbean and in North, Central America and South America who were involved in similar processes, embraced the opportunity to speak to the theme of the Fifth Summit and its relevance to their needs.

Your discussions yesterday, which I understand were stimulating, focused on thematic underpinnings of the draft Declaration – human prosperity, environmental sustainability and energy security. I am certain that today's dialogue will continue the diversity of perspectives on the issues and challenges confronting our societies. In other words, this Forum has provided an opportunity for **the Caribbean** to discuss the many common concerns and desires of **our** peoples, to define mutual objectives and to find a common way forward.

As you may be aware, negotiations on the draft Declaration commenced at the Third Regular Meeting of 2008 of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) in Barbados (September 18-19, 2008) and continued at the Fourth Meeting in Antigua and Barbuda this month (15-17 October, 2008), with a focus on the human prosperity pillar of the Declaration. Two SIRG meetings are scheduled to take place before the year ends to further the negotiation process in an on-going spirit of cooperation, steadfastness and consensus. It is imperative that we remain focused on our goals, that we work together and engage you and other affiliate organizations throughout the Hemisphere to produce a document that captures the needs and future aspirations of our peoples in the Caribbean and the rest of the Hemisphere.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we all seek a shared objective and have a collective responsibility - that each citizen in the Americas could reap or experience some tangible benefit from the Summit process that

would positively impact on their daily lives in an environment which promotes development, peace and security. The recent and on-going economic turmoil in major global economies underscores the fact that new challenges will arise and present ones may be exacerbated throughout the Hemisphere affecting the social and economic lives of individuals, families and communities across the Americas. However, we must look at the opportunities before us.

We should, therefore, use the preparations for the next Summit to provide us with concrete solutions to the myriad global challenges which include – controlling crime and violence, food security, reduction of poverty and inequality, environmental protection, energy security, improving governance and revitalizing the many institutions charged with the responsibility of addressing not only the Hemisphere's shared problems but its vision for the future.

Trinidad and Tobago is honoured to host the Fifth Summit of the Americas but more importantly, we are adamant that the mandates espoused in the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain **must** indelibly change, in a tangible and meaningful way, the structure of our present realities. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is wholeheartedly committed to encouraging and facilitating civil society participation in the Fifth Summit of the Americas and the Summit process itself. You are one of the agents of change by not only being a distinct and critical voice and advocate for the fundamental freedoms and dignity of peoples but also offering innovative solutions and monitoring fulfillment of Summit mandates. As Article 6 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter states: **“It is the right and responsibility of all citizens to participate in decisions relating to their own development. This is also a necessary condition for the full and effective exercise of democracy. Promoting and fostering diverse forms of participation strengthens democracy.”** I trust that your deliberations will continue on the path initiated yesterday and remain convinced that your invaluable perspectives would capture the independent voices of those who have entrusted you and all of us with their concerns and expectations to deliver the benefits that past and future Summits promise.

Thank you.