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AN ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE PATRICK MANNING PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE FIFTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

April 17th 2009
Hyatt Regency

I would like to begin by thanking my colleague Heads of Government for giving us the opportunity to host this Fifth Summit of the Americas on behalf of the Caribbean Community. I hope that at the end of it all you will be satisfied enough to conclude that the confidence you reposed in Trinidad and Tobago, in affording to us this signal honour has not been misplaced.

Already my dear friends this summit is historic, we have among us, the first female President of Chile, President Michelle Bachelet. We have among us the first bishop to be appointed President of his country, Bishop Fernando Lugo of Paraguay; we have with us the first member of the indigenous community of Bolivia, President Evo Morales, elected President of his own country. I understand that President Morales has just come out of a five day hunger strike so just against the possibility that he has not yet fully regained his strength I would just like to let him know that we have a concoction here for him, we call it a corn soup and if that does not do the job we can invite him to join us either at Curepe junction or Debe junction if he prefers for a doubles. I assure him that after he has participated in those culinary delights he would want to describe himself as “un hombre nuevo.” And of course we have with us this evening President Barack Obama of the United States and I would like to say to President Obama that we in Trinidad and Tobago watched with great interest his progress in that election campaign in the United States and the making of history as he was elected to that particular office; the exalted office of the President of the United States, the first of his kind to be so elected. His presidency brings with it a tremendous amount of hope and we here in Trinidad and Tobago share the positive anticipation of so many others all around the world that his administration will indeed be heralding the dawn of a new day.

I would also like to thank the very distinguished President of Argentina Christina Fernandez de Kirchner for the opportunity that I have been given to share a platform with her, to Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua who I fondly refer to as Daniel my brother, to my other brother from Central America Dean Barrow of Belize and of course President Obama. It is a signal honour to share this platform this evening with these distinguished personalities of the Western Hemisphere and of the world.

One and a half years ago when we began the discussions and the consultations in the western hemisphere designed to bring about a document that we call “The Declaration of Port of Spain” which will be signed on Sunday. The situation existing in the world was very different from the situation that exists today. Within recent time there has been the subprime crisis in the United States of America, there have been bank failures and a credit squeeze that has led to a shortage of financial resources for the conduct of trade and for the purposes of development, and we have seen a lot of countries including many of the developed ones go into a recession.

We are heartened by the decisions taken by the G20 countries in early April not too long ago in London when 1.1 trillion dollars was identified for recovery of one kind or the next, 500 billion dollars to the International Monetary Fund and 250 billion for the purposes of advancing trade and development. The problem my dear friends is how are these resources to be allocated and if these resources go to institutions that are not the subject of reform, then I fear that developing countries can find themselves once again short changed in these recovery efforts and that at the end of the day, the results will in no way reflect the extent of the contributions that have been made in that direction.

The time has come ladies and gentlemen for us to take our leave of Bretton Woods and to create a new architecture of the international financial institutions designed to bring about a more equitable distribution of the resources that are available. The other threat we face in this regard is, where will the money for trade and development go, how is it to be allocated. The threat is that the bulk of it might well go to Europe as opposed to the Western Hemisphere and if that turns out to be the case then we would not have benefited to the extent that we would have liked to. And I would like to submit to my colleagues, distinguished ladies and gentlemen that these are matters that are worthy of the attention of Heads of Government as we meet here in Port of Spain for this Fifth Summit of the Americas.

And as we do so it is important that we take note of the special circumstances of the small states of the Caribbean. There are a number of states in the Eastern Caribbean, independent countries, whose independence was predicated on an economic model that anticipated preferential market access, especially to Europe. With the signing of the recent EPA with Europe both those things have disappeared and even as some countries have sought to diversify their sources of economic activity into the tourism industry, we find that the events of 9/11 adversely affected all of them and today as recession has hit the world we find that these countries are once again adversely affected, their tourism industries are adversely affected.

Some of them my dear friends have moved into the direction of tax havens and that too is under threat, the question therefore is this, what is the future of the small states in the Caribbean that find themselves in this most unfortunate position. And I would like to submit again that this is a matter that is worthy of the attention of Heads as we meet here in Port of Spain.

And then we have the accident of geography, the Caribbean located as it is between the producing countries of the south and the consuming countries of the north, we talk about drugs, and as the drugs pass through these countries on a transshipment basis in the first place, the guns that accompany them do not leave, the guns stay, sometimes the service is paid for in drugs creating a drug problem in your own country and countries in the Caribbean and the proliferation of guns leads to an increase in crime in many of these countries. So we end up with a drug problem and a crime problem, not of our making that is the reality of life in the Caribbean today.

Indeed the crime problem is so acute that in a recent UN report, it was argued that if the levels of crime in Haiti and in Jamaica could be reduced to the level of crime in San Jose, Costa Rica then both Haiti and Jamaica are likely to undergo an increase of about 5.4 percentage points in their GDP, not insignificant at all and I assure you that the problem is not restricted to Jamaica and Haiti alone Trinidad and Tobago and so many others are also affected.

How are we to deal with this and more than that ladies and gentlemen, you have the question of terrorism that is now raising its head in the region, not purely on the basis of the drug culture but also some of it imported from outside of the region, the details need not detain us at this time. However, it is becoming clearer to us that in the Western Hemisphere we need to know who is going where and who is doing what, we need an advance passenger information system as one important step in seeking to address this matter. I submit my dear friends that this is a matter that is worthy of the attention of Heads as we meet here in Port of Spain.

And then we have education, to educate is to emancipate, so many of our citizens right through the hemisphere, about 800 million people, so many of them are neither in school nor at work, not exposed to education nor gainfully employed, so they may look after themselves and their families and all that goes with that. How we treat with this matter is a question that we can discuss and it is a question that is worthy of our attention.

At the same time we have a health care problem, peculiar not just to the developing countries, a problem with which the United States of America is now battling. The old arrangements whereby we seek to cure whatever ailments arise has been demonstrated to be unsustainable. We have found that at that rate we are going, having to apply more and more of our financial resources to health care, even if we are able to sustain that which is highly questionable, then a point will be reached where the demand is so great for financial resources that it will be beyond the capability of countries to provide it. That whole paradigm has to change and more and more attention is being turned to prevention as it must and to the noncommunicable diseases which are the greatest contributors now to a prejudicing of our health system and deaths in the Western Hemisphere. That is a matter that we can discuss.

My dear friends, Canada, the United States, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, all of the countries are countries that are significant producers of oil and gas. When you look at the resources of all of these countries combined, they are enough to guarantee the level of energy security to which all countries in the region aspire but that can only be the case if proper relations exist among the countries, one to the other. And if that is not the case my dear friends, then the anticipated level of energy security will not be available to us and the nuclear option becomes more attractive and all that goes with that. So what may have started off as a difficulty in the domestic energy balance can end up as a question of international concern involving the possible proliferation of nuclear weapons. That is a matter my dear friends that we can discuss.

And then there is Cuba. All of us my dear friends would like to see a proper reintegration of Cuba into the institutions of the Western Hemisphere. Recent announcements by the President of the United States including the announcements this evening are cause for great optimism. We look forward to the day and I look for to the day when Cuba can take its rightful place among its colleagues in the hemisphere.

And so my dear friends, it will be a mistake if we allowed any one issue to dominate our deliberations so many important matters are on the agenda. It will be a tragedy if we allow any one issue to be a great source of discord among us, and it will be an error of existential proportions if we are not able to conduct our business on the basis of cordiality and mutual respect. And let it not be said of us that we failed our people in their hour of need, because we lack the maturity and good sense to conduct our business in a rational and objective manner and let this Fifth Summit of the Americas be the first in a new approach that heralds in the Western Hemisphere, the dawn of a newer and brighter and better day.

God Bless you all!

