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OPENING REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON, MINISTER OF  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AT THE DIALOGUE  
BETWEEN MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SOCIAL ACTORS

(April 17, 2009 - Princess Theatre, Caribbean Princess - Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago)

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Colleague Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Trinidad and Tobago officially embarked on the road to the Fifth Summit in September 2006 and, since that time the Government has consistently highlighted the need to work with all our the principal actors towards the Fifth Meeting of Heads of State and/or Government of the Hemisphere. Today, April 17 – a mere few hours before the Opening Ceremony of this defining event, Trinidad and Tobago is deeply appreciative of the unyielding support which we have received from all of our hemispheric partners – Member States of the Organization of American States including past Summit hosts, Secretary General Insulza and the General Secretariat of the OAS, the institutions of the Joint Summit Working Group (JSWG) and representatives of the social actors present here today.

The consultative process has been wide-ranging and deep, starting with the choice of the theme for the Summit of “*Securing Our Citizen’s Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability*”. I was honoured to have had the privilege of presenting the theme and Concept Paper for the Summit to the Permanent Council of the OAS last April. The feedback from Member States guided Trinidad and Tobago in the formulation of the draft Declaration of Commitment as did the response by social actors to the call for their views on the Concept Paper. To this end, we were certainly heartened by the Hemispheric Consultation with Civil Society held in May 2008 in Miami which was attended by over one hundred (100) persons from twenty-seven (27) countries in the hemisphere – representing all geographic regions and groups such as small and medium enterprises, think tanks, academia, indigenous groups, afro-descendants, women, the handicapped, persons living with HIV/AIDS, and consumer groups, among others.

As the **sensitive** negotiations on the Declaration of Commitment progressed, the views of many social actors were circulated to Member States and tabled officially at meetings of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG). The SIRG negotiators therefore benefitted from the consultations of civil society held last October in Trinidad and Tobago, December in El Salvador, Peru in February this year and at the OAS in March as well as from the consultations undertaken by the private sector in the Hemisphere.

I must, at this juncture, commend the many social actors who have travelled the road to the Fifth Summit with us. Many of you journeyed to the different consultations, on successive occasions, at considerable sacrifice and with finite resources.

As I stated at the forum with civil society held prior to the start of the 38<sup>th</sup> OAS General Assembly in Colombia last year - the importance of fostering a positive and productive relationship with social actors cannot be understated. Your contributions, expertise and feedback are vital to the inter-American agenda as we seek to make it more relevant and most importantly, to ensure that policies adopted touch the lives of the people of this Hemisphere in a meaningful, tangible way. The views shared by the social actors on issues which impact on the development and well-being of people from Asunción, Georgetown, Mar del Plata, Port au Prince, San José, and Brasilia among others, have greatly enriched the process.

As such, the commitments to be undertaken by our leaders span a plethora of areas under the thematic pillars of Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability and set against a backdrop of respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The world has changed considerably since December 2007 when the theme for the Fifth Summit was released but we in Trinidad and Tobago, believe that it is just as pertinent today as it was sixteen months ago...perhaps even more so.

We cannot forget that much progress has been made in the Americas since Miami in 1994. In the last six years in particular, Latin America and the Caribbean registered an average economic growth rate of 5%, improved employment figures and a reduction of poverty levels, among other encouraging indicators. However, on the cusp of the fifteenth anniversary of the Summit process and against the backdrop of unpredictable evolving dynamics in the global economy, these gains are being eroded. Not one country in our Hemisphere is spared. This is the time for us all to work together to keep the regional ship steered on a path to prosperity for all. As the Honourable Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago stated earlier this year to our country's Parliament "*in this increasingly inter-connected world where many uncertainties abound and change is constant, pursuing development cannot be an insular exercise.*"

Today's forum is therefore a key element in the Way Forward and is in keeping with the Charter of the OAS (Article 45f) which recognizes that the incorporation and increasing participation of the marginal sectors of the population in the economic, social, civic, cultural and political life of a country is essential to achieving the full integration of the national community, acceleration of social mobility and consolidating democracy. This is further supported in the Inter-American Democratic Charter (Article 6) which acknowledges the "*right and responsibility of all citizens to participate in decisions relating to their own development*".

The once wide gap between the public and private sectors and social actors is swiftly decreasing. The tripartite mechanism within the Labour sector, and the resultant benefits, is perhaps the best example of the strength of partnerships of all interest groups. As the outgoing Chair of the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labour (IACML), Trinidad and Tobago has been in a unique position to appreciate the collaboration from a hemispheric perspective.

The commitment exists on all our parts to engage meaningfully. This was reflected as recently as yesterday at the Special Parliamentary Dialogue of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas which examined the issue of "Engaging Parliaments in the Summits of the Americas' Process" and explored the potential for deeper cooperation between Parliaments and Governments towards advancing hemispheric goals. Here I posit that you and your colleagues, as constituents, have a responsibility to engage your respective parliamentary representatives in your countries.

### Timelines

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, before we move to the presentations by the Social Actors, I wish to entreat every reporting group to adhere strictly to their twelve minutes in order to facilitate the interventions and interaction that follow. Because of today's full agenda, I also wish to ask my Colleagues who plan to take the floor, to tailor their interventions to two to three minutes.

I thank you.