

**STATEMENT BY THE  
HONOURABLE PATRICK MANNING  
PRIME MINISTER OF TRINIDAD AND  
TOBAGO  
TO THE HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES ON THE  
HOSTING OF THE FIFTH SUMMIT OF  
THE AMERICAS AND THE  
COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF  
GOVERNMENT MEETING IN  
PORT OF SPAIN IN 2009**

**JANUARY 23, 2009**

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this Honourable House and the national community on the two important international conferences that Trinidad and Tobago will host this year – the Fifth Summit of the Americas and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Almost one year ago, I announced to the country that Trinidad and Tobago will have the honour and privilege of hosting these two Conferences. Today, I want to state quite unequivocally that the Government remains fully committed to the successful hosting of these two Conferences and to meeting all of our obligations to our guests from across the Western Hemisphere and the Commonwealth.

From April 17-19, 2009, the Fifth Summit of the Americas will take place here in Port of Spain and will be followed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting from November 27-29. We expect to have more than 70 world leaders here in Port of Spain to discuss issues and develop collective responses that are

pertinent to the lives of some 2.8 billion people living in the Americas and the Commonwealth.

I should also add that in the week leading up to the official programme of activities for each Conference, a number of meetings will be convened to engage civil society, private sector leaders and youth representatives in ongoing dialogue on developmental issues and to facilitate their contributions to the respective multilateral processes.

Mr. Speaker, there are misguided notions in some quarters as to why this Government has undertaken these international commitments. Let me assure the national community that when we took the decision to host these events, it was in the context of the very progressive vision we have for this country, and after very, very, careful consideration of the benefits that can accrue to our people, and the wider CARICOM Region from leading multilateral initiatives of such importance and magnitude. We saw the opportunity to move Trinidad and Tobago to the centre stage of hemispheric and global

multilateralism that could also lead to a strategic advantage for our own development and progress.

Mr. Speaker, in this increasingly inter-connected world where many uncertainties abound and change is constant, pursuing development cannot be an insular exercise. May I add, Mr. Speaker, that as one of the more successful economies in this Hemisphere, we also have a lot to offer in terms of good practices that other countries are quite keen for us to share with them.

The point I want to emphasise here is that we must engage in higher levels of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. We must pursue greater integration across this Hemisphere and with major emerging economies; and we must advance the interests, and promote the well-being of our citizens. This strategy is essential for small developing nations like ours. In specific terms, for example, through bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements, already signed and in the pipe line, we can further the diversification of our economy through encouraging foreign direct investment in the non-energy sector of

Trinidad and Tobago. This will promote the sustainability of economic and social development in this country.

It is in this context that we must see the benefits of leading these multilateral initiatives, which are an integral part of our foreign policy, and which consolidate and extend the high and very positive profile that our country now enjoys in international affairs. Our growth and development as a country are very much tied to how we project ourselves in, and engage with, our CARICOM neighbors, our Hemisphere and the wider world. Many of the challenges we face are transnational in nature and therefore, to a significant degree, require transnational solutions. This renewed engagement with the Americas and the Commonwealth of Nations is being complemented by initiatives with West, Central, East and Southern African as well as China and India, two of the most dynamic economies in the world.

There is much to gain from this intense involvement in global affairs. The benefits span the political, economic, social and cultural spheres.

The obvious gain is of a political nature as a relatively small country such as Trinidad and Tobago has a strategic opportunity to host the Presidents and Prime Ministers of this hemisphere and the Commonwealth to discuss pressing priorities against the backdrop of current international developments. As the issues on the global economic and political arena evolve, the Summits create a forum for these leaders to discuss the modalities for collective action in addressing such issues.

The Government also understands the importance of these events for CARICOM Member Countries. We have promoted the Fifth Summit as a CARICOM effort, and will use the opportunity to bring to the forefront of the inter-American and Commonwealth agendas, development issues that are relevant to the realities of our small states.

Furthermore, by presiding over this process, Trinidad and Tobago is in a position to give priority to the challenges facing our sub-region; and to propose mechanisms to ensure that the outcome impacts

positively on the wellbeing of the people in our own country. I am heartened to know that the other countries are appreciative of the approach adopted by this country to producing tangible results that affect citizens everywhere.

The theme of the Summit of the Americas, is '*Securing our Citizens' Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability*'. For the Commonwealth the theme is equally engaging: '*Partnering for a More Equitable and Sustainable Future*'. These themes address issues that affect all countries, at a time when dramatic changes are taking place. The global economy is now experiencing a deepening slowdown with major economies already in recession, and there is growing opinion that the situation will get worse before it gets better. No country or region is insulated from the negative effects of this situation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to find solutions together. In today's interdependent world, we need strengthened partnerships more than ever.

Our country is poised at this crucial time in our development to facilitate the kind of dialogue within two important groupings of

countries that will provide expanded opportunities for wealth creation; alliances; business partnerships; poverty reduction; job creation; skills development; border security and crime prevention.

On Tuesday, Mr. Barack Obama was inaugurated the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. This new leader in the White House has enunciated the need for the kind of diplomacy which brings people together. The Summit of the Americas comes some two months after his inauguration and it will be the first multilateral forum in our Hemisphere at which he will have the opportunity to interact with his counterparts on issues affecting us all. The prospects for a new engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean must not be down-played. We are, therefore, extremely honoured that he will grace our shores to share, for the first time, his vision and hope for the future of our Hemisphere. The US, like the rest of the world, recognises that partnerships are vital to dealing with economic, security, energy and environmental challenges. And, Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago will provide the platform for the holding of these discussions.

In 1994, when the leaders of the Hemisphere first met in Miami on the initiative of President Clinton, it was against the background of sharing accumulated experiences; programming collective, multilateral and national actions; and developing solutions to the problems that affect the people of the Americas.

I was pleased at that time to represent Trinidad and Tobago.

That mandate has not changed. Indeed, Trinidad and Tobago is seeking to make the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain different from the preceding Summit documents. We are seeking to focus on strategies for implementation and functional cooperation.

In fact Mr. Speaker, the conferences in Port-of Spain will set the agenda for the next three years in both the hemisphere and at the level of the Commonwealth. The areas under focus are all extremely pertinent to the further growth and development of all nations, including Trinidad and Tobago. These include:

- The global economic situation;

- Managing the Environment and mitigating the effects of climate change;
- Ensuring reliable and affordable supplies of clean energy;
- Promoting conditions conducive to decent work;
- Expanding economic opportunities for the Youth;
- Strengthening social protection and poverty eradication programmes;
- Building human capacity and competencies through the strengthening of the education system at all levels – early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary;
- Improving access to comprehensive, quality healthcare;
- Strengthening public security systems;
- Care of the elderly, the disabled and other vulnerable groups;
- Increasing competitiveness, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship; and

- Improving the effectiveness of our implementation mechanisms.

Mr. Speaker, these Conferences give leaders the opportunity to talk to one another, to build partnerships and alliances and to understand the peculiar circumstances facing each country. The goal is to find pragmatic, implementable responses that bring economic and social benefits to all countries, and for the requisite resources to be provided through existing hemispheric institutions and cooperation commitments to finance all the areas I have just outlined.

By broadening our collaborative base, we can ensure the viability of our economy and the sustainability of our society. New opportunities will arise for shaping and strengthening new and existing forms of North-South and South-South cooperation, including increased flow of resources for technical cooperation.

Furthermore, these events are integral events of the strategy of positioning Trinidad and Tobago as a financial and conference centre which will, in turn, spawn economic opportunities for the provision of a wide range of goods and services. This activity will not be confined to the April Summit but will continue through to the Commonwealth

Heads of Government meeting and other conferences which Trinidad and Tobago has already successfully lobbied to host. This is expected to be a sustainable venture as this country is being increasingly favoured by international organizations to be the venue for their respective fora.

This interest acknowledges that Trinidad and Tobago possesses the relevant infrastructure and capacity, of world class standards, to undertake such ventures. I want to emphasise, Mr. Speaker, that all leaders of the thirty-four countries in this hemisphere are expected to attend the fifth Summit of the Americas. The international media will be here in full force; and during that period the focus of the world will be on Trinidad and Tobago. It is an unprecedented opportunity for our country to be showcased internationally, with the obvious concomitants redounding inevitably to the people of our country. Following the high-level Summits, it is anticipated that more requests to use our facilities will be forthcoming and that there will be an increase of business tourists on a continuous basis. The opportunities for hotels, taxi drivers, artisans, caterers, interpreters, room attendants, tour operators, business equipment and other

suppliers are therefore many. This is an important component of the return on the investment in the waterfront development project.

One must not underestimate the value from the experience of servicing a Summit and the consequent creation of employment, and building of human and institutional capacity including upgrading of skills and infrastructure.

May I remind the national community that the Hyatt Hotel and the other buildings on the Waterfront are all owned by the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Private sector leaders will be meeting almost in parallel with the Heads of State and Government to discuss, in the case of the Fifth Summit, a new agenda for sustaining competitiveness. They will seek to define parameters for working closely with governments to restore stability and confidence in the global trade and economic system and facilitate business growth and human prosperity.

Thus far, the private sector has been enthused by the forthcoming fora and has identified many issues which it would like to see placed on the agenda. They are keen on the linkages to be made with the

various regional and international businesses that have shown a keen interest in attending the meetings.

Mr. Speaker, it is a known fact that every host country of these international conferences has reported increased Foreign Direct Investment in the aftermath of the meetings. We have an extraordinary chance to open doors further to trade and industry.

As you can see Mr. Speaker, in one fell swoop, so many national objectives can be achieved with these two conferences. I must however caution those who expect instantaneous results, that the benefits of hosting these events will materialize post 2009, as we begin to implement the commitments agreed on April 19 and November 29, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of logistics, over the past several months, we have been coordinating our preparations to host the Conferences through a joint public-private sector initiative that has many of our citizens from the business community and civil society working alongside public officers and the National Summit Secretariat. The Secretariat has also been coordinating its efforts with the

Organisation of American States in Washington DC and with the Commonwealth Secretariat in London.

In the area of security, many of the regional and international mechanisms for assistance used for Cricket World Cup will be reactivated.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all our citizens who have participated in the preparation thus far. I also thank those countries that have graciously offered their support to us in preparing for these multilateral initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the national community that we will be ready with all the preparations. In the planning process, logistics and security coordinators have been working quite diligently to minimize the disruptions to our citizens and our business community. However, I urge all our citizens to understand the critical responsibility we have of ensuring the safety and comfort of our visitors. Some disruptions are inevitable. Beginning next week, the National Summit Secretariat will begin a series of public communications initiatives to keep the national community abreast of the arrangements that are being developed.

Mr. Speaker, we are less than three months away from the Fifth Summit of the Americas. Let us not underestimate the importance of our role as host and the benefits it can bring to the development of our country and our sub-region. Together, the Fifth summit of the Americas and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting will be the most significant international undertakings on which we have embarked in the history of our country. As a nation, and as a people, we must seize the opportunity to take our rightful place in global affairs, and to chart our own destiny. We must work in concert to welcome our friends from across the Americas and the Commonwealth and to showcase our talents, our skills and our warmth and energy. Lets us be proud of the respect our country has in the global community and let us show the world what a great people we are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.