

National Secretariat for the Fifth Summit of the Americas 2009
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
18th Floor, Nicholas Tower,
63-65 Independence Square
Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago



Press Release

Praise for Civil Society Involvement in Summit Process

June 30 - The National Secretariat for the Summit of the Americas has been commended for its work in promoting civil society involvement in the Summit process and is being encouraged to maintain a high level of collaboration with representative groups in Trinidad and Tobago and the Americas.

Chairman of the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute (TTTI), Mr Victor Hart offered such congratulations during the organisation's Annual General Meeting in Port of Spain on June 26.

TTTI Secretary Mr G. Boyd Reid, in a report to the meeting, also cited the organisation's participation in the Civil Society Hemispheric Forum in Miami, Florida on May 1-2. The Forum was organised by the National Secretariat in preparation for the Fifth Summit.

The report says the Forum "provided CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) with the opportunity to formalise their comments on and recommendations arising from the ... Summit Concept Paper."

Addressing the AGM, National Summit Coordinator, Ambassador Luis Alberto Rodriguez said the Secretariat had been "very deliberate in our efforts to incorporate the views and experiences of a multiplicity of actors across the hemisphere."

These, he said, included member states, regional financial and developmental institutions, and civil society organizations.

"Our current phase of work on the Fifth Summit involves the preparation of the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain," he added.

He said as work continued on the Summit Declaration "it is our intention to continue our engagement with all the major stakeholders in the Summits Process, including civil organizations, to listen closely to their concerns, their insights and their perspectives on the way forward, to ensure that the interests of all the peoples of the Americas are best served."

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Ambassador Rodriguez said the Fifth Summit “presents us with an opportunity to focus, together, on finding concrete and tangible solutions” to the challenges of poverty, inequality, energy security and environmental sustainability.

“Within all of this,” he added “civil society has an enormously important role to play.”

The Ambassador said civil society organizations across the hemisphere are engaged in a range of activities – from advocacy to service delivery.

“They campaign for change and fight to eradicate injustice. They fervently defend fundamental freedoms and promote democracy and economic development across the Americas,” he said.

He added that such organisations “play a central role in keeping people informed, and provide mechanisms to solicit the opinions of the public and to promote broad participation.”

“Their greatest strengths lie in their ability to engage, to empower and to build networks to extend their reach into the most marginalized of communities.”

“In the final analysis,” Ambassador Rodriguez said, “civil society organizations are the voice of the people, a distinct and independent voice and it is the civil society organisations, more than any other entity, which understand and can communicate their reality. Who else will speak on their behalf?”

The Ambassador said a draft Declaration of Commitment for negotiation by countries of the Americas ahead of the Fifth Summit should be available for discussion within the next two months.

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About the Summit of the Americas

The Summit of the Americas brings together the 34 democratically elected leaders of the Western Hemisphere to exchange ideas and opinions on the main political, economic, social and security challenges facing the Hemisphere and to develop strategies and solutions to collectively address them.

The Fifth Summit of the Americas will be hosted in Trinidad and Tobago on April 17-19, 2009.

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