

**Connect Americas Summit
Panamá City, Panama
17-19 July 2012**

**Policy Statement by
Her Excellency Mrs Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan,
representative of
Her Excellency Mrs Kamla Persad-Bissessar
Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad y Tobago**

I bring greetings from the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar who apologizes for her inability to attend this historic meeting of the countries of our Region.

Our Prime Minister is very pleased that the ITU had the vision to establish the goal of 'Connecting the Unconnected' by 2015 and the foresight to enlist the help of the Broadband Commission to achieve this vision.

The regional summits in support of this initiative have drawn attention to the power of information and communication technologies (ICT) and in particular broadband connectivity in meeting the future goals of sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Trinidad and Tobago regards ICT as a critical sector to diversify our economy away from our dependence on our finite natural resource, oil and natural gas. In recent years we have made shifts in our national development policies from short-term survival to a long-term sustainability and in so doing recognize that our primary resource is not hydrocarbon based, but is essentially the innovative and creative genius of our people.

We are currently finalizing our National ICT Strategy of which a critical component is our national broadband plan as reflected by the fact that the broadband infrastructure projects submitted to Connect the Americas total over \$200Mn dollars. Going forward the Government is of the view that access to broadband is a basic human right rather than a privilege and therefore aims to achieve 100% broadband coverage through public private partnership arrangements supplemented by the strategic use of the Universal Service Fund. Through legislative and regulatory reform we are creating an environment that is market-driven, encourages healthy competitive behaviours and supports innovation in service delivery.

As the distinguished representative from Grenada, the Honourable Nazim Burke, has pointed out we all recognize that to improve the lives and livelihoods of the people of the Caribbean,

especially those of us who live in Small Island Developing States, we must connect to and find our own niche in the Digital World of the Twenty-First Century.

Trinidad and Tobago therefore fully aligns itself with the sentiments expressed by Minister Burke.

We in the sub-region do speak with one voice and hopefully we can together project that voice strongly enough to convince all our colleagues here today that the wider hemisphere should also speak with one voice that is strong enough to reach out to the rest of the world.

Yesterday, the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) tabled a document summarizing the projects submitted under the Connect the Americas initiative.

Trinidad and Tobago is of the view that the CTU Paper is a first step in exploring the synergies and symbiotic relationships that might be possible under the five (5) major thematic areas advanced by the ITU for ICT development. On closer investigation it is evident that there are three common threads linking the five thematic areas:

1. Opportunities for the private, public partnership investment in hard and soft infrastructure;
2. Harmonization of the legal and regulatory frameworks throughout the region; and
3. developing human and innovative capacity

It is a regional approach to project identification, development and financing. It is a start to what we see as an increasing focus on collaboration and the exploration of common solutions to shared challenges. Above all, it is the start of a harmonization and consolidation process that significantly improves the Caribbean's economies of scale, and allows our voice to be heard by investors and development partners the world over. Trinidad and Tobago as President of the CTU, commits to this collaborative approach to increasing the uptake and usage of ICT in our region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago, realizes that the path to sustainable development requires us to leverage the power of ICT. Our sub-region cannot speak with one voice unless we are connected.

The Connect the Americas Summit therefore speaks to the heart of what we are trying to accomplish with ICT. We are excited by the Summit; we are committed to the process that we have started here in Panama; and we look forward to deepening our collaborative relations with our friends and partners in the Americas Region.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you.