



**Statement**

**to the Permanent Council**

**of the**

**Organization of American States**

**by**

**Her Excellency La Celia A. Prince**

**Wednesday, May 21, 2008**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman:

- Vice Chair of the Permanent Council, Ambassador Moncada
- Secretary General, Dr. Jose Miguel Insulza
- Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Albert Ramdin
- Distinguished Permanent Representatives and Alternates
- Distinguished Permanent Representatives of Observer States
- Staff of the General Secretariat of the Organisation of American States
- Ladies and gentlemen:

It is my distinct honour and privilege to address the Permanent Council as the Permanent Representative of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the Organisation of American States. I assume this responsibility at a time when the Organisation is at a significant milestone in its history, having recently celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> year of existence under the OAS Charter and having been a uniting force within our hemisphere for six decades.

I come before you humbled, yet emboldened. I am humbled by the magnitude of the work which I have been chosen to do on behalf of my country in this Organization, but at the same time, I am emboldened by the knowledge that OAS, which operates in the good spirit of consensus, always manages to do what is pragmatic but just, in the interest of the peoples of the Americas. I thank His Excellency, our Governor General, Dr. Frederick Ballantyne and Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves and his government for the confidence they have reposed in me to perform this enormous and noble task. I would also like to acknowledge my predecessor Ambassador Ellsworth John, with whom I worked and from whom I have learned quite a lot.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines was still in the embryonic stages of its development as an independent democracy when it became a member of this organization in 1981. Still a relatively young nation today, St. Vincent and the Grenadines continues to do its part in the consolidation of democracy in this

hemisphere. Our engagement in this Organisation has been a palpable demonstration and reaffirmation of the commitment we make to strong democratic values and good governance; political pluralism; freedom of expression; respect for human rights and the full observance of the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman, among the priorities of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines are economic and social development, poverty alleviation, the education of our youth, the creation of employment, as well as national and regional security.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines values the enormous contribution made by the OAS in strengthening its own capabilities to deal with the many and varied challenges presented to us. Through the invaluable support and financing provided by the *Special Multilateral Fund of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development* (FEMCIDI) we have been able to implement many small but very important development projects and programmes in my country. Similarly, the ongoing fellowship programme provides a boost to the number of students gaining access to tertiary-level education each year.

Our hemisphere is constantly confronted by threats to our own security. The political directorate of the OAS guided by the skillful and intuitive elected officials and their staff demonstrated its clear vision for the security of the hemisphere, but embracing a multidimensional approach in ensuring our security.

Being a member of this organization has also provided St. Vincent and the Grenadines the access to financial and technical resources to frontally tackle the plethora of these emerging security concerns, which can potentially jeopardize the well-being and security our nation and its people while thwarting social and economic development.

The increased incidences of violent crime and the emerging phenomenon of criminal gangs in many of our countries; the expanding networks of

transnational organized crime; the constant threat of terrorism, are all issues which require cooperation for a joint response. Through the work of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) and its Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has not only gained a heightened awareness of gravity of the these threats facing us, but the programmes designed by the OAS to confront these problems have given our government an excellent mechanism for horizontal cooperation and information sharing with other countries of the region.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines has also benefited tremendously from the work of the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE) and the Inter-American Commission on Ports (CIP), through programmes designed to make our port and border security more robust. Through one of the newest departments of the Organisation, the Department of Public Security, the OAS has shown itself to be responsive to the needs of Member States in dealing with security issues such trafficking in persons, the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, as well as risk reduction and management strategies in the face of natural disasters.

Since the OAS came into being 60 years ago, it has stood as the standard-bearer for peace and democracy in our region. Today, OAS continues to make a clear and cogent case for its existence and its relevance. Our leaders continue to demonstrate their confidence in the OAS to be an honest broker in the settlement of political disputes. Recent events clearly attest to this. And so sixty years on, the OAS shows itself to be still perfectly relevant to fostering peace and democracy in our hemisphere. St. Vincent and the Grenadines intends to do its part in ensuring that the Organisation has the necessary financial health to continue to perform its important functions.

Sixty years after the Charter of the OAS was first signed in Bogotá, Colombia, the supreme decision-making body of this Organisation, the General Assembly, will meet again in Colombia under the theme “Youth and democratic values”. Mr.

Chairman, I take this opportunity to congratulate the government of Colombia for the selection of this theme. We appreciate its symbolic significance too, as though renewing our commitment to the OAS Charter and ensuring that it leaves a fine legacy of democracy for generations to come. A democratic country does well to invest in its future by investing democratic values in its youth.

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished Permanent Representatives,

Of parallel importance too, is the role that the OAS must play as defender and promoter of social justice, equality and economic development. As Article 11 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter clearly states:

“Democracy and social and economic development are interdependent and are mutually reinforcing.”

And so it behoves the Member States of this Organisation to foster a rich collaboration that will create opportunities for the economic prosperity of their people. A political democracy in which social exclusion and extreme poverty still thrive is a significantly compromised democracy. Democratic institutions and democracy itself become imperiled when critical development challenges are not addressed. Earnest efforts ought then to be made to advance the political, economic and social advancement of all peoples.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines applauds the gallant efforts made so far by the Permanent Council and CEPCIDI in advancing the negotiations on the Social Charter, a document which when completed and brought to life will signal a real commitment by the leaders of our hemisphere to fight the scourge of poverty that is so prevalent among us. For this reason, we look forward to the timely conclusion of negotiations on the Social Charter-- a Charter which is backed by guarantees that can help to improve the lives of all in our hemisphere; a Charter which can help deliver social stability and security to our hemisphere.

It merits emphasizing that is not just a matter of negotiating the Social Charter, but doing so in good faith with a goal to an early conclusion. As was stated at a recent joint meeting of this Council and CEPCIDI by the Permanent Representative of Brazil, Ambassador Osmar Chohfi, the Social Charter is “the best gift we can give ourselves for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OAS.” Mr. Chairman, St. Vincent and the Grenadines believes that the successful negotiation of an effective, robust and meaningful Social Charter and an accompanying Plan of Action will hail a victory for social justice, and economic development in our hemisphere.

Our Western Hemisphere is rich: in history, in culture, in diversity and in income. Some of the world’s wealthiest live within this hemisphere; yet millions find themselves excluded from the gains of such prosperity. The 96 million among us who live in extreme poverty throw into sharp relief the level of inequality that exists in this part of the world.

The daily struggles for survival already facing the poor and marginalized are even further exacerbated by the recent global rise in food prices. The problem of food security will not be solved by money alone, but it most assuredly will not be solved without it. At the same time, several other factors –including the growing use of crops to create biofuels-- feature prominently in addressing this challenge of food security and the nascent crisis sitting on our doorsteps.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, who will host the 2009 Summit of the Americas, selected a most appropriate and timely theme: “*Securing our citizens’ future by promoting human prosperity, energy security and environmental sustainability.*” To be sure, this theme will generate substantial discussion since the views on these issues differ widely. But the three pillars encapsulated in this one theme are all of critical importance in addressing this odious poverty which prevails among us.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is happy to pledge its support to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as it takes the helm, guiding us all into the Fifth Summit of the Americas and we look forward to the outcomes. We are confident that sharing their collective wisdom, our leaders will forge a framework for action which will redound to the enduring benefit of all in the Pan-American community.

The OAS is uniquely placed in the development matrix of this hemisphere: it plays a central role in implementing many of the mandates coming from the Summits of the Americas, as well as it is the nucleus for so many organs, agencies and entities of the Inter-American system. It therefore carries enormous potential for delivering to this hemisphere the level of integral development which we earnestly seek. Through the Strategic Plan for Partnership for Integral Development, the OAS must redouble its efforts to make good its promise for delivering integral development to the region.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines recognizes the immense value of being a member of this venerable organization. We acknowledge that the success of the OAS is entirely dependent on the political will of its Member States. I take this opportunity to renew to you, Mr. Secretary General, the assurance of St. Vincent and the Grenadines' continued engagement in the work of this organization. I humbly ask the support and collaboration of the Member States, the leadership and the staff of this Organisation in making my tenure as Permanent Representative a successful one.

Thank you.

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