

**STATEMENT PRESENTED ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON FOOD SECURITY  
HELD AT FAO HEADQUARTERS, ROME, 16-18 NOVEMBER 2009**

Delivered by: **Senator the Honourable Arnold A. Piggott**  
Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources

Mr. Chairman  
Your Excellencies, the Heads of State and Government  
Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director General of the FAO  
Representatives of other UN Organizations  
Honourable Ministers  
Permanent Representatives  
Delegates  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring you greetings from the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Honourable Patrick Manning.

We are convened here in Rome at a moment of great uncertainty in human history. The very foundations of our civilization have been shaken over the last two years in particular by a confluence of crises in the global economy, in agriculture and world food supply, and in the financial sector. There is also the pressing issue of climate change which must be addressed if we are to preserve for posterity, the beauty, ecological diversity and dynamism of our small, fragile planet so that it can sustain future generations.

The history of human civilization is the history of human conquest, of mankind's ability to overcome complex problems and challenges to his existence. The success of these efforts is what sustains and indeed propels development, thus raising human achievement and aspirations to new heights as if only to prepare for those as yet unseen challenges that lie in the path of civilization's advancement.

Thus it is, that facing the real prospect of unmitigated global economic and financial collapse, those countries who together account for the overwhelming majority of global output found **the will and courage** to act to save the global economic system from complete paralysis. And while it is clear that some severe hurdles remain, it is also true to say that it now appears that the worst has been avoided in the global economy and in international financial markets, as a consequence of this **insightful coordinated multi-national action**.

It begs the question, therefore, that with the rapidly deteriorating situation of hunger, malnutrition and poverty in the world, is it not right and appropriate that we as leaders mobilize the political will to commit to finding enduring solutions to these problems? Can we not as Governments, resolve to take sustained action **now** to remedy the situation?

Trinidad and Tobago belongs to the Regional grouping of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and lies within a region, the Caribbean, which was hard

hit by the global food situation a year or so ago. As small islands with limited land space, vulnerable to the perennial onslaught of hurricanes and other destructive environmental phenomena, much of our food requirements are met through imports. This has manifested itself in a persistently growing food import bill that is partly the result of **the inability of local producers to compete, in their own home market, with artificially cheap imports**. As such, to a significant degree, domestic food prices in Trinidad and Tobago show a strong correlation with price movements in the global food industry. As a consequence, a progressively larger proportion of revenue and foreign exchange has to be diverted from financing economic development to paying for **subsidized food imports** from developed countries.

As has been the pattern globally, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has found it necessary to intervene in order to stem the escalation in the cost of food to the national community. In this regard, our **national strategy focuses on promoting domestic food security** within the larger framework of the Caribbean Plan of Action, the Jagdeo Plan, which aims to achieve food security on a region-wide basis in the Caribbean. Accordingly, with a view to stimulating increased food production for domestic consumption, the Government has prioritized the creation of an enabling environment, so as attract private investment into the agricultural sector, as a key component of achieving profitability, growth of the sector and long term sustainability. As such, the Government's strategy involves promoting and facilitating the dynamism of the

local Agriculture Sector, as well as the growth and expansion of agri-business, underpinned by a development strategy which places emphasis on investment, innovation and technology, institutional strengthening, and information.

Mr. Chairman, an absolute imperative in the global efforts to promote increased food and nutrition security is greater access to modern and appropriate technologies by developing countries to support their efforts to promote higher, levels of production and productivity, as well as the modernization of their Agriculture Sectors. In this regard, increased focus must be placed on the development of technologies that are more appropriate to local conditions in these countries. Seed germination continues to be an issue of concern to farmers in developing countries.

Mr. Chairman, even as we take bold measures to address the production and distribution bottlenecks affecting the Agriculture Sector in Trinidad and Tobago, we are patently aware that food imports will in all probability continue to play an important role in the nutrition and wellbeing of our people.

It continues to be a matter of great concern, therefore, that global systems of food production and distribution are inhibited and indeed circumscribed, by factors and policies quite alien to the principle of market discipline and, even more fundamentally, to the recognition accorded to **food as a basic human right** for promoting human dignity by the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman, the need to agree on a broad strategy to boost world food output in general and in Developing Countries in particular, given that they will be the main drivers of increased demand, is a first priority. Beyond that, Mr. Chairman, failure to adjust the current commercial arrangements and to adopt more pragmatic approaches can trigger imponderable consequences and create new and very sensitive challenges that may prove quite difficult to control let alone resolve. We cannot ignore recent evidence at the height of the food crisis, in which pressures both within and between certain States contributed to political instability – a phenomenon too widespread to be dismissed as either isolated or contained. Survival being the most basic and commonplace of human instincts, the availability of food or lack therefore has repeatedly contributed to several human conflicts – an undesirable state of affairs indeed.

Mr. Chairman, one thing is clear. Given the pervasiveness of the problem, the only effective and credible response must be that of a broad global coalition for sustainable food security involving: **Governments**, the **Private Sector** and **International** and **Regional Development Agencies**, such as the **World Bank**, **the Inter-American Development Bank** and others, as well as the United Nations; with the Governments providing leadership in addressing the plight of the **billion** people **formally** classified as **hungry**, but also developing and implementing an Immediate Action Plan to pre-empt those at **imminent risk** of slipping into the ranks of the hungry.

Taking such action **now** would be the right step at the right time. Over the last several months, we have seen **clear signs that confidence is returning** to the major global markets and, at least in some of the key economies, economic growth being restored, albeit at much lower rates. In the face of the continuous increase in the demand for food, which intensified the food crisis a year and a half ago, speculative behaviour by those trading in futures has been on the rise.

In the same way that, with a view to promoting improved governance of the global financial system, it was deemed necessary and prudent to set limits on the “casino-type” behaviour that triggered the financial crisis, in order to avoid excessive risk-taking, there needs to be some **globally** agreed mechanism to **discourage** and reduce speculation in global food markets, which distorts market prices. **Human welfare and well-being** ought not, Mr. Chairman, to be held hostage to unreasonable and reckless profiteering, though no one could possibly minimize the **valuable and legitimate role** of the Private Sector in guaranteeing a sustainable food supply to future generations, especially through research, technology and innovation.

Mr. Chairman, it is a matter of regret that the responsibilities of the Honourable Patrick Manning, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as Chairman and host of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference, which convenes in Port of Spain in ten (10) days, have pre-empted his presence

among you in Rome. Quite apart from our own experience and challenges in the Caribbean in promoting food security, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is all too aware of the gravity of the problem of **food distress and food insecurity** in several Commonwealth Developing Countries, many of whom like us in the Caribbean, are disadvantaged by various impediments, including natural disasters.

It is the wish of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that every success will be achieved in our deliberations. It is most encouraging that yesterday, the Conference adopted a clear and credible Plan of Action, and in so doing, placed Food Security among the top priorities of the global agenda. That priority status must have longevity, if it is to be effective in promoting and guaranteeing sustainable World Food Security.

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago stands ready and is willing to join in support of programmes, which may include an **effective communication strategy** for bringing attention worldwide to the call for increased food production, sustainable food supplies, improved food security, world peace, and the social stability of the International community now, and in successive future generations.

Mr. Chairman, I Thank You.

*17<sup>th</sup> November, 2009*