

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

STRENGTHENING HEMISPHERIC RELATIONS:
A VIEW FROM THE CARIBBEAN

Washington, D.C.
Monday, April 4, 2011

PARTICIPANTS:

Introduction:

STROBE TALBOTT
President
The Brookings Institution

Moderator:

MAURICIO CARDENAS
Senior Fellow and Director, Latin America Initiative
The Brookings Institution

Featured Speaker:

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR
Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

* * * * *

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TALBOTT: Madam Prime Minister, not only have we got a beautiful spring day, just about the first one we've had in Washington -- I think all the Washingtonians in the room will agree -- but you also have a remarkably polite audience. It is not common for everybody to rise in respect for our visitors here, so we're off to a very good start.

(Applause)

MR. TALBOTT: It's my great pleasure to be able, not just to welcome here to Brookings but to welcome back to Brookings, Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. And she comes here with a very distinguished delegation that includes her Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister Rambachan, and also her Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism, a position we should think about having here in the United States, Minister Peters. And she is, of course, ably represented here in Washington by Ambassador Parson. We're very pleased to have you here with us today. And we have Ambassador Ramdin of the OAS here as well. And it's a very good turnout indeed for an important event.

I might say that just as the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is very well represented here in Washington, President Obama and the United States of America are well represented in Port-o-Spain. We have Her Excellency, Beatrice Welters, the American ambassador to Port-o-Spain with us who is a very dear personal friend of quite a number of us here at Brookings and also an institutional friend. Before she went into public service she was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Brookings Institution.

Now, the prime minister is here for a four-day visit. She has already started a busy schedule. She will be meeting with members of the United States Government. That means both the executive branch and, of course, the legislative branch. She will be meeting with representatives of the private sector, and I'm glad that you were able to find a little time to spend some time with us here in the NGO and think tank sector.

And as I mentioned at the outset, the prime minister is returning to Brookings. Thanks to Ambassador Welters I had a chance to sit down with her and talk when the weather was quite a bit chillier back in November. And I must say I learned a lot from the 45 minutes or so that we spent together. I was very impressed by the force of her personality and also her political acumen which she comes by as a result of a long and distinguished career in her country. She has been a member of parliament for a long time and led the opposition up until such time as she became the head of government. She won election a little less than a year ago, if I'm not mistaken, on a platform of vigorous opposition to crime and corruption, and also on her determination which she has shown an ability to match with getting the job done of building a strong and effective coalition of five parties. In fact, I think the Washingtonians in the room rather wish that you would extend your stay a little bit longer and help us work out a decent degree of pragmatic cooperation just between two parties here in this town. So I'll leave it to whether your schedule permits that or not.

The prime minister's presence here, I think, underscores the importance of the United States of America's neighborhood particularly to the south, by which I mean the Caribbean countries and the countries of Latin

America. President Obama, I think, found an important and symbolically significant way of demonstrating his own commitment to strengthening the relationships within this hemisphere when early in his administration he went to Port-o-Spain to participate in the Summit of the Americas. And, of course, just two weeks ago he headed south once again.

There are a number of issues of concern to the United States that also relate to Trinidad and Tobago's future. And I have no doubt that the prime minister will touch upon some of those issues in her remarks here this afternoon. One that I'm quite sure she'll mention, not least because her country is a net producer of energy, is the issue of energy and climate partnership between the United States and Trinidad and Tobago. After the prime minister addresses us, she has agreed to discuss in the first instance with my colleague whom I'll introduce in just a moment, some issues of bilateral and regional importance, and then the two of them will open up the discussion so that all of you can have a chance to interact with our distinguished guests.

Presiding over that part of the program will be my friend and colleague, Mauricio Cardenas, who is a senior fellow here at Brookings, and he's a senior fellow I think quite significantly not just in one of our research programs but two of our research programs, namely Foreign Policy and Global Economy and Development. He is also the director of our own Hemisphere Initiative and he has played an important role in setting up today's program.

But most of all, Madam Prime Minister, we're grateful to you for being here and the lectern is now yours. So once again please recognize and thank the Prime Minister.

(Applause)

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Thank you very much, Mr. Talbott for your very warm welcome. This is warmer than last November. I agree with you. Thank you for having us here.

Mr. Mauricio, thank you for agreeing to moderate this evening's program. And if I may give special thanks to Ambassador Bea Welters. Will you please stand? She is your representative in Trinidad and Tobago. (Applause) And she makes us all very proud. We thank you and her wonderful husband, Tony, who flew back out of New York to join us today. Thank you for being here, Tony.

Our ministers of the government of Trinidad and Tobago, my Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Suruj Rambachan and honorary Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism, Mr. Winston "Gypsy" Peters. And may I say that's a new ministry I created when I formed the government because of the diversity that is Trinidad and Tobago. As you may know, Tony and Bea, you know, Trinidad and Tobago, and many may know that we are a microcosm of the macro. That is to say every creed and every race in the words of our anthem has an equal place. And so I formed the Ministry of Arts and Ministry of Culture and I said, no, we want arts. (Inaudible) said last night thank you very much for that. And multiculturalism so we can bring it all together.

Also with us is Ambassador Dr. Neil Parson, young ambassador who has recently been posted here to Washington. (Applause) And who has been making us very proud. We look forward to more cooperation with him and with those of you here in Washington. My advisor on Commonwealth and

Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. Shem Baldeosingh. (Applause) And I hope to promote him now to be OAS Brookings, U.N., and all other matters relating to national relations.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, all, I thank you very much for joining us this evening so we may have a conversation and hopefully to build cooperation. But before I continue, let us also please acknowledge the presence of Mr. Ramdin, assistant secretary general of the OAS. Sir, please, will you stand? (Applause)

And his assistant, Ms. Shelly Dass, who is as well. Thank you for being here. (Applause) Thank you, Shelly.

To you distinguished ladies and gentlemen, all, at the outset I want to express my very sincere appreciation to the Brookings Institution for providing us here from Trinidad and Tobago with an opportunity to address you very prestigious ladies and gentlemen, distinguished all. It is especially important for me since my understanding is that the Brookings Institution is ranked as the world's top think tank. Do you agree? Give a round of applause if you agree.

(Applause)

And your reputation, sir, Mr. Talbott, messieur, your reputation is well-founded. For almost a century your organization has conducted independent research and provided recommendations which have helped to shape the policies of U.S. governments. Your work additionally has also impacted on a national committee. Your influence in the development of United Nations and the elaboration of the Marshall Plan are only just two examples of your global reach. These two landmark developments have thus benefitted from

your ideas, your independent thoughts, as well as your stated goal for among open, safe, prosperous, and cooperative international system. And if I may, ladies and gentlemen, ask you to give a round of applause to the Brookings Institute and thank them for having us here today.

(Applause)

And so what's in it for me as prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago and for the 14 nations which comprise the CARICOM? And what is in it for us as a commonwealth? Today I chair an office of the 54 nations of the commonwealth and it is my respectful view that the Brookings Institution can be, is, and will be a very useful facilitator. We may use a common language, a common (?) to see a go-between.

Your institution can help us bridge the gap among the power brokers in Washington in devising short-, medium-and long-term policies to assist my country, as well as a wider Caribbean community, as we strive to play our part in fostering the economic and social welfare, as well as the security and provision of opportunity for all our people. It is said that when the U.S. catches a cold, the Caribbean sneezes. Trinidad sneezes. And so whatever you do here or what we do and vice versa, we do have a semantic relationship in my respectful review.

And so Mr. Chairman, we in Trinidad and Tobago, we are committed to playing our part in ensuring that the Caribbean's role in hemispheric relationships is enhanced. Since assuming the office of prime minister in May last year, I have recognized, like the Brookings Institution, the importance of high quality research as an important component in devising plans for the economic

and social development of the people of my country and indeed, of the wider Caribbean region. We are in your back door. We say we are in Uncle Sam's backyard in the Caribbean and indeed, we do form a very important part in my respectful view in terms of our geographic location and in terms of the enhancement and upholding of democracy in this region.

In Trinidad and Tobago we are committed to playing our part in ensuring the Caribbean's role is enhanced in terms of hemispheric relations as I said before and the product of your research and an assessment of the future economic well being of Trinidad and Tobago in the context of an ever-changing international economic and financial situation. Of course, my government, they embark on the development and transformation of our economy to meet the needs of the current and future generations.

Our strategies, ladies and gentlemen, are founded upon seven pillars aimed at guiding our country's development and the sustainability of our democracy. And these seven pillars are:

One, people centered development. This is even more important in the context of the recent social uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East. Trinidad and Tobago has a long history of the rule of law and of participatory democracy.

The second pillar is on poverty eradication and social justice. In view of our commitment to achieving the MDGs, we have already surpassed MDG 2 for universal primary and now we are moving towards universal preschool education. We already enjoy universal secondary education and because of that our tertiary level sector is also growing.

The third pillar is national and personal security. Our parliament has recently passed anti-gang legislation and reform of the criminal justice system is underway but I must admit that we are facing serious challenges in the arena of security, national security and international security. And this is because of proximity to Central and South America, Latin America. I'm advised by the DEA, your DEA, that we face serious challenges when we come to transshipment. Trinidad and Tobago is seen as a nation of transshipment. And to us it is for international drug trade and arms trade and so on. Our domestic local is suffering very seriously from that international transshipment of drugs and arms. And so that is a number one priority for us. The fight against crime is the number one priority facing my government and our country at this time.

The fourth pillar, information and communication technologies. Trinidad and Tobago has a policy to provide free laptops for all students entering our secondary schools. I was very happy and very proud that that was one of the first things we undertook when we formed the government last year. And whilst it is we are just going with the ones who are entering, that is the first formers into the secondary system. My aim is that within five years every single child in a secondary school in Trinidad and Tobago will be equipped with a laptop computer or its equivalent as technology changes.

The next pillar is that of a diversified, knowledge-intensive economy. And in terms of that again, education is a key plank as we move out of diversifying our economy and indeed making it the same. You know, we are now in the fourth age. You had the various ages, the last one being the industrial revolution. Now, the fourth age is the knowledge revolution. And so we are

gearing up to prepare our people in that regard.

Pillar good governance. We have introduced legislation, streamline and procurement procedures, and also anti-corruption legislation. We have established a financial intelligence unit to monitor among other things challenges linked to white collar crimes. Good governance then means participatory democracy, but at the same time open and transparent governance. And in this regard through administrative procedures as well as legislative procedures and legislative framework we are working towards improving governance structures in Trinidad and Tobago.

The final pillar of seven, number seven, foreign policy. And here our emphasis is on trade and investment and on multilateral relations. And only this morning Excellency Ramdin will recall at the OAS we spoke about partnering in this area of south-to-south trade and investment and we hope to see those bear fruit.

We recognize that our continued economic prosperity is also linked to our regional and international partnerships. As a member of CARICOM and the 14 nations in the CARICOM, we remain committed to honoring our obligations under the Treaty of Chaguaramas establishing what is known as a CARICOM single market economy. While a single market is already in force with T&T being a significant exporter to other member states based on size and competitiveness of our manufacturing sector, the region has not yet witnessed the establishment of the single economy and that's an area we really would like to have more development in. We will do our part to rectify the shortcomings that have bedeviled the regional single market since its inception. With the

establishment of trading blocs within Central and South America and an increase in the number of free trade agreements among them and with countries in North America, the continued growth and development of T&T's economy and eventual creation of a single CARICOM economy is imperative if we are to compete globally.

In an increasing globalized market, small, open economies would not be able to sustain themselves. Nevertheless, my government will continue to play the role of facilitator by providing an enabling environment to attract both local and foreign investors to do business in Trinidad and Tobago.

And in this regard may I take this opportunity to tell Mr. Talbott and those of you here at Brookings, in June we shall be hosting in T&T a Caribbean Business Investment Forum. It is our plan to partner with the Commonwealth Business Council and to bring together partners within the region, the CARICOM, but also from North, Central, and Latin America, South America. This forum will be held on June 13-14, and we will welcome your participation in same. My ambassador here in Washington will provide details to you, Mr. Talbott, and to the Brookings Institute. And we look forward to having your presence in Trinidad and Tobago at that time.

And I am very much involved in this; we are, because we see that we are well poised geographically and in other ways where we are in the Caribbean to bring the old world and to bring the new world together. I spoke of it this morning at the OAS. We can see Trinidad and Tobago as a gateway for the commonwealth nations because we are now sharing the Office of the Commonwealth. But at the same time to bring together the commonwealth

business with North America, South America, Central America, and the CARICOM region. I see this as a very important focal point in bringing us all together to see how we can better partner for the benefit of the people of all our nations. And so I invite you and we will provide further information for those of you who would like to come. As I said, June 13-14 of this year.

Energy sector. If I may speak to you a bit about that. Trinidad and Tobago will for some time in the future remain an oil and mostly a gas economy. In 2010, the United States imported 190 billion cubic feet of gas from Trinidad and Tobago. This represented 44 percent of the LNG imported by the U.S. last year. It makes our nation, Trinidad and Tobago, a tiny nation of 1.3 to 1.4 million people, the largest exporter of LNG to the United States. I am also very amazed each time I remember this and when I speak to you all here in the U.S., to know that this very tiny island nation state is the largest exporter of LNG to the U.S. In fact, over the last 10 years Trinidad and Tobago, which is roughly the size of your state here, the state of Delaware, we have consistently been the number one supplier of LNG to the U.S. with a supply of as much as 75 percent of U.S. LNG in 2008.

Currently, natural gas production is in the region of four billion cubic feet per day or approximately 650,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day. This should be considered in the context that current crude oil production is approximately 100,000 barrels per day and the fact that T&T has less than one percent of the world's proven gas reserves. The government of Trinidad and Tobago has been successfully able to transition from an oil-based economy in the '70s and the '80s to now today a gas-based economy with minimal gas

reserves at our disposal. As such, we have been used as a model by other countries which are now in infancy of developing their gas industry. This is especially so for African countries to the extent that the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago has recently been selected as a partner by the government of Ghana to develop and implement a major project to transport, process, and distribute natural gas to downstream facilities, primarily power plants.

Our participation in Ghana will also serve to create a transnational model for midstream and energy services development that can be used anywhere in the world as we expand our energy services sector. And may I say that Trinidad and Tobago has one of the oldest one of -- the oldest supplies. We have been 100 years in oil and thereafter coming into gas, so we are well poised in terms of export of services in the energy sector. This is why Ghana was able to partner with us in this regard to develop their energy sector, and we have been invited to Brazil by British Gas to see how we can further partner in Brazil, which is also exploiting and exploring and expanding their energy sector.

So Trinidad and Tobago energy service companies are increasingly flying our flag in places like Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Canada, the U.S. and Venezuela, and throughout the CARICOM region. But I say respectfully, we are consistently and constantly looking at avenues to increase our energy reserves and extract more value from our depleting energy resources. Our new model calls for increasing our oil and gas production from our deep water acreages, two-thirds of which have not yet been exploited. In February this year we received five bids on three blocks for exploration in the Atlantic Bid

Round. Successful bids will be announced later this month. At the same time, our Ministry of Energy proposes a comprehensive review of a well controlled regulatory framework to minimize the environmental and other risks associated with deep water exploration.

Our new paradigm also calls for increased local participation along the entire value chain of the natural gas industry. This will create greater value for gas by producing higher value products and generate additional employment through associated industries linked to downstream activities. In this regard, we are at the moment considering a new, integrated chemical manufacturing complex to be commissioned involving seven plants to manufacture an array of products, including ammonia, urea, ammonium nitrate, and melamine. Whilst these projects would need more participation in the value chain, the government of T&T intends to go further and leverage the strengths of the energy sector to develop synergies and further linkages with our manufacturing sector. Our government will also be looking to pursue opportunities in other segments of the value chain, including shipping, regasification, and distribution. And these are the areas, as I say, that we can partner in further through our Caribbean Business Investment Forum.

Whilst the U.S. continues to be our prime market for LNG, there has been a concerted effort to diversify our markets to ensure optimal value and revenues for our state. Given the commercialization of large shale gas resources in the U.S. with the consequent suppression of gas prices, we have been careful not to carry all of our energy eggs, LNG eggs, in one basket. Chile, Brazil, India, and Canada are very new destinations for LNG cargos from Trinidad and

Tobago. We are also cognizant of the Panama Canal expansion project and inherent implications for the LNG business in the Atlantic basin. And whilst we remain dependent on the oil and gas hydrocarbon-based energy sector, we are also now looking towards clean energy.

As leaders of the western hemisphere, we recognize that clean energy is fundamental to the western hemisphere's sustainable development and the prosperity of our citizens. They are committed to expanding cooperation to address the intertwined challenges of energy security and climate change. To strengthen American collaboration on these issues, U.S. President Obama invited all countries in the western hemisphere to join in an Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas. This comprises initiatives that will focus on (1) renewable energy; (2) energy efficiency; (3) energy poverty; (4) infrastructure; (5) cleaner and more efficient use of fossil fuels; (6) sustainable forests and land use; and (7) climate change adaptation.

The goal of this Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas is to foster partnerships across the Americas to achieve low carbon economic growth and development. My government is committed to the development of renewable and alternative energy products. As such, we are actively exploring the development of alternative energy, including wind and solar as new thrusts for the regional creation of a sustainable energy industry. We have assumed our place in the Renewables 2010 Global Status Report as one of the developing nations aggressively pursuing a renewable energy industry. And as I say this, part of our business forum later this year in June, renewable energy, green energy is going to be a major part of that focus as we invite partnerships; we

invite investment in the area of clean energy.

Before I left Trinidad and Tobago, my Minister of the Environment, I have instructed him that every new set of lighting that we put down should be solar lighting rather than using the hydrocarbons, using that energy. Even though it's cheaper to us at this point in time, we plan for the future. And so we plan to put down 15 surveillance-based for the Minister of National Security along some of our highways. We have instructed all of these to be solar parts. In addition, all our recreation grounds that we are now going to just put lighting on them which did not have lighting, we have instructed -- I have instructed they be for solar energy as well.

So we are looking at partners. And I talk about investment and business and so on. We are looking for partners when we come to clean energy, renewable energy, as we take our place in assisting and helping in the thrust to have a greener environment and thereby sustaining this earth for our children.

My friends, we have expressed our commitment to the development of an energy policy for T&T through a process of public consultations and discussions. To this end, a framework for the development of a renewable energy policy for Trinidad and Tobago is being developed for public review. We still have a long way to go to bolster our renewable energy sector. Barbados, for example, is a well developed, solar-water heat industry. In Belize, I'm told, 44 percent of its 2008 electricity generation came from hydro power. And so we in Trinidad and Tobago will not be left behind. And to this end we have introduced a package of fiscal incentives legislated last year in 2010 by my government to include no import duty on wind and solar equipment; zero rating

for value-added tax on wind and solar equipment; a wear and tear allowance of 150 percent of expenditure in acquiring wind and solar equipment; a tax allowance of 25 percent of the value of solar water heating equipment to a maximum of \$10,000 per household.

In November 2010, in order to reach a high per capita carbon footprint, my government announced the formation of a compressed natural gas task force that has already shifted to natural gas as an alternative transportation fuel. And so I'm saying whilst the energy sector on the hydrocarbons remains very dominant and is very much important to the development of my nation, we are moving forward in terms of clean energy. Thereby, we've created a fiscal regime to allow for and to create the incentives for investment in non-energy, non-hydrocarbon energy.

Another area for us in terms of diversification now of our economy in a move away from depleting resources in the energy sector is tourism. While our energy sector is likely to be the engine of our growth and development, we are now placing considerable attention on establishing alternative revenue streams in the context of these depleting energy resources. In Trinidad I say, you know, oil and gas, you know, they are not like mangos, and here you may say apples that continue to grow off the trees and you plant more trees and you will continue to have it; these are depleting resources. They will not last forever, and therefore, if we are to maintain the quality of life for our citizens we must diversify. We must create other revenue streams apart from those in the hydrocarbon sector.

And so because of these declining oil and gas revenues, we

experienced a contraction of -3.5 percent in 2009; 3.5 percent growth in 2009. Our annual review of the economy 2010 projects growth at about two percent, and the IMF projects that we expect it to grow by 2.5 percent in this fiscal year 2011. But prior to that I am saying we will experience minus growth.

Tourism then becomes very important for us in economic diversification, and therefore, we need to place more emphasis on this sector as an alternative revenue stream for Trinidad and Tobago. You may all know (inaudible) including that in our islands, has suffered from the effects of the global financial downturn. As a tourist destination, Trinidad and Tobago in my respectful view has much potential. Secretary General of the OAS today spoke of the carnival and the cultural aspects of our tourism. Our product ranges -- I say so with the greatest of humility but also not so modestly -- our product ranges from traditional sun, sea, and sand in Tobago, our sister island, including excellent diving, adventure and ecotourism on the islands, but also to business tourism -- meetings, conferences, and exhibitions in Trinidad and Tobago which tends to be more industrialized, and Tobago is the paradise you would want it to be. I think we have one of the oldest natural forests in the world. So the ecotourism is very important. Sun, sea, and sand, Tobago. Trinidad, as I say, for business tourism, we're looking to develop in that regard.

And I know my Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism is here. He would want me to tell you and to invite you to come to Tobago. We are famous for our carnival, the cultural aspects of Trinidad and Tobago. Our carnival has gone in February. Well, the Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism is so impressed by the rave reviews we've received everywhere. So for those who couldn't come

in February to Trinidad, the minister is going to be having carnival in Tobago in October. We don't have a date yet. (Laughter) So we want to invite you and welcome you to come to carnival in Tobago in October. Any dates, Minister?

SPEAKER: Yes, the last week in October.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: The last week in October. So, if you miss February, you can come in October, as well.

So tourism, then, I'm saying this sector has contributed significantly to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. And may I say again not so modestly, in February, ambassador, you were there, every hotel room was booked. Every airline ticket was booked. Every one of the (inaudible) was booked out. Every, you name it, every band that was playing in the carnival, every one was booked out. So those, again, I come back, Minister, I'm helping you sell your carnival in Tobago.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

(Laughter)

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: You couldn't get a flight. You couldn't get a hotel room. Tobago is going to be open for business in October.

In Tobago, what I'm saying, study by world travel and tourism counts in '09, the travel and tourism industry accounted in Trinidad and Tobago for 10.6 percent of total GDP, which is quite high for Trinidad which does not really concentrate on tourism. In Tobago, the broader travel and tourism economy, GDP, was estimated to represent 36.9 percent of the island's economy in 2009. The guiding principles upon which this sector has been developed are,

one, sustainable tourism.

Festivals and events. And that's another wonderful thing about Trinidad and Tobago. As I said when I started speaking, every creed and every race finds an equal place. And so we have persons of origin from almost every major block in the world. And therefore, Trinidad and Tobago, I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing, has the highest number of holidays, what you will call bank holidays. (Laughter) In the world. That is because we celebrate all the festivals and events for the diverse peoples of the universe. So we want to promote tourism in that regard as well.

Contribution to social development. Contribution to economic development or economic linkages, job creation and foreign exchange earnings. TNT has identified and is actively promoting the development of the following tourism niche markets including cruise ships. As I said before, festivals and events equal tourism, meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions, sports and yachting.

Mr. Talbott, sir, we will be very happy to host a business conference of the Brookings Institute. So we invite you and welcome you.
(Applause)

By 2019, the forecast for the industry share of GDP is anticipated to rise to 12.7 percent.

Another area, if I may speak to you on, remittances. Of concern, the IEDP projects that after nearly a decade of growth, remittances to the Caribbean is likely to decline this year. The slowdown is of concern because remittances play a vital role in many of the regions' economies and surpassing

the combined amounts from FDI, from Foreign Direct Investment and development assistance, that countries and institutions, such as the World Bank, provide. Some of our region states -- Guyana, Haiti, and Jamaica, receive 12 percent or more of their GDP From migrants who live abroad. It is vital for us as a Caribbean region to work together to mitigate this developing trade. Many countries in the region are strengthening links with Diasporas for investment, trade, knowledge, and technology transfer opportunities.

As I have this conversation with you, I want to turn to a topic that is very close to my heart and that is education. We are mindful of the fact that the 21st century is a knowledge driven era where its success, economic and otherwise, were more and more dependent on -- will be dependent on critical thinking, innovative, and entrepreneurial citizenry. In this regard, in Trinidad and Tobago, tertiary education is free for all our citizens. We also pay tuition and other costs up to the level of Ph.D. studies for all first class honors on the graduate studies at selected universities.

We are committed to developing a university town in St. Augustine, such as will focus on developing innovative businesses linked to the outputs of nearby tertiary institutions. University and community college campuses are being established throughout our country to make tertiary education more accessible. At the same time we are seeking to establish universal preschool education, to provide these preschool students, especially those from disadvantaged homes, to start their education on as equal a footing as possible. And may I say quite proudly, while we have universal primary education, universal secondary education, we are now moving in this term of

office to establish universal preschool education.

I have mentioned before to some of you and I say today very proudly that we were able when I was Minister of Education I had the blessing and good fortune to introduce universal secondary education in Trinidad and Tobago. That was almost 10 years ago. And the impact that is now having on the tertiary sector is tremendous as our tertiary level sector education is growing by the day and by the minute. And so it is in keeping with the philosophy of the thinking that education is the only possible -- it is the only key out of poverty and to improving quality of life. And so my government, my administration is very focused on pressing and pushing for education, education, education at every single level in our country.

Agriculture and food production is another very important area. Twenty years ago according to the CARICOM secretariat, net agriculture trade surplus for the region was approximately three billion annually. Surplus. Today the region is in deficit, paying close to 3.5 billion annually in food imports. Great cause for concern.

We have embarked on a number of key strategic measures aimed at repositioning our agriculture sector. Our Ministry of Food Production, Land, and Marine Resources has sought to widen the definition of agriculture from primarily that of improving food security to encompass the value chain, including primary production, processing, marketing, food services, agritourism, and agri-entertainment. A collaborative public-private sector focus is envisioned in a transformation plan for the agriculture sector. Agriculture to agribusiness, strategies for increasing agriculture production for food and nutrition security, and

competitors of T&T which now provides the basis for day-to-day operational planning. We have also embarked on an accompanying development strategy that promotes family small farms, as well as commercial farming enterprises.

I think it is no secret to any one of us sitting here that the issues of food security, food prices, is a major global issue. And so in our small own way and our small own land, we seek to move towards improving our food security through the agriculture sector.

Health is another sector that is very important and is deeply involved in our health ministry in initiatives for access to safe and nutritious food. In this regard, our Ministry of Health is developing a national health system which in part is a system through which health care in T&T will be financed and managed. When fully developed, the NHS would ensure universal access to an essential package of health services in both the public and private health sector. In other words, the patient will have a provider of choice. We have in regard to the fact that non-communicable diseases (NCD) account for a significant promotion of debts in the region and in the developing world. We are pursuing initiatives to place the NCDs high on the agenda of the United Nations. Our country is mindful that NCDs affect the development process not only through the cost of treatment but also through the deaths of persons who are no longer able to contribute economic growth and development.

In our region, the major causes of death are diabetes, hypertension, and cancer. These are the consequences of lifestyle choices and are therefore preventable. In this regard, through the initiative of the CARICOM states, the United Nations will host a major side event on NCDs on a margin of

this year's UNGA in September. Yes? And this has been sponsored, as I said, by the CARICOM states. For those of you who can give us your support, we look forward to that support.

As I come to close, I say if you're dead you cannot enjoy good health, good environment, good housing, good food, good clothing or anything that is good. So priority one, priority two, and priority three must be security of life and limb, security of property. And so following the terrorist bombings of September 2011 [sic] claiming thousands of lives, the destruction of billions worth in property damage, your institutions were once again in the forefront in conducting research and developing influential proposals for homeland security and improvement of intelligence operations in the U.S. These efforts are very commendable because they helped influence the introduction of several initiatives which have since then prevented major terrorist attacks in the U.S. and we congratulate you for that.

For us in Trinidad and Tobago and the CARICOM, we are not immune to terrorism and increased levels of crimes and violence. We have the misfortune of being located between the major producers and the consumers of illicit drugs. We have sought to confront these issues both nationally and with the support of our CARICOM partners, as well as those outside of our region. For us, organized crime, drug trafficking, and illicit trade in small arms and light weapons are cross-border in character and therefore require the cooperation of all states at both regional, hemispheric, and global levels.

In my capacity as prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, as well as in my portfolio as prime minister with responsibility for crime and security and

a quasi cabinet of CARICOM, I am aware of the effects that escalating levels of crime, fueled by the illegal arms trade and illicit trade that narcotics are having on the socioeconomic fabric of CARICOM countries. We are faced with attendant ills such as increases in homicide, organized crime, and other serious offenses largely committed by handguns which have been diverted from illicit markets into the hands of the criminals. It has not escaped us as well that rampant crime is not conducive to a healthy business environment attractive to investors.

Consequently, together with our CARICOM partners, we have established a headquarters in Trinidad and Tobago and Port-o-Spain the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security, acronym IMPACS. IMPACS is especially designed to administer a collective response to crime and security priorities of member states. IMPACS has partnered with other hemispheric bodies, such as the Central American Integration System, the OAS, and Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism to ensure that there is a reduction of serious crimes within our countries. Essentially and bilaterally we have also worked with the U.S. and other friendly governments on this question.

To complement our efforts at a hemispheric level, we have been staunch advocates for the conclusion of a United Nations arms trade treaty to regulate the trade in conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons and ammunition. Regulation of this trade will assist in preventing the diversion of these weapons to the illegal market and reduce, if not eliminate, their proliferation in my region which is neither a manufacturer, nor an exporter or large importer of small arms and light weapons but our region has witnessed the negative impact on our societies. Fire arms are rendered useless in the hands of

criminals if there is no source of ammunition. The fact that between 2006 to 2010 more than 7,000 illicit fire arms were recovered by law enforcement suggests that there must be a thriving industry in existence to supply and perhaps resupply the owners of these illicit weapons.

The problem seems greater when those weapons are seized with ammunition as attempts at identifying the source usually fails miserably due to the absence of adequate markings to assist with tracing. It is because of our belief in a multilateral solution to this growing scourge that we have expended significant funds to hosting -- co-hosting in July last year, as well as in February this year again, two regional workshops on the arms trade treaty.

I want to take this opportunity to call on you, sirs, at the Brookings Institute, to use your tremendous capability as researchers, as change agents in lobbying those concerned so that in 2012, the U.N. conference will result in the adoption of a strong, robust, and legally binding instrument to regulate a trade in conventional weapons inclusive of small arms and light weapons and the ammunition. I make this plea being aware of reluctance of some key international players to have a very potent arms trade treaty.

As I close I want to thank you again for giving us this opportunity to discuss some of the opportunities and challenges which face Trinidad and Tobago and the other small CARICOM nations. Many of these issues, including the consequences of climate change, are not of our doing yet we are called upon to pay the price. We are, indeed, citizens of the interconnected global world. Actions by one have consequences for everyone else. It is therefore important that a distinguished organization, such as the Brookings Institution, use your

(inaudible) to foster the kinds of global linkages which will make this world a better place for all humanity.

I thank you. May God continue to bless you all. And of course, may God continue to bless Trinidad and Tobago and all the nations of the world. Thank you and God bless.

(Applause)

MR. CARDENAS: Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Madam Prime Minister for those really stimulating words. One feels after listening to you that one has lived their whole life in Trinidad and Tobago as you really describe very well all the beauty of it, but also the policy challenges. And most importantly what your government is doing. So we really congratulate you for that clear leadership, which is not only the leadership of a nation; it's also a leadership that transcends the nation. It's the regional leadership. And you were always very careful in your speech and I took very clear note of intersecting with the region and making sure that in your capacity as a leader of the CARICOM countries you alluded to the situation in the other economies as well.

My first reaction, now we are a bit overtime now but we'll take 10 more minutes if you allow us to basically ask the audience to make a few questions but also if you allow me, listening to you it's clear once again that this whole hemisphere shares the same problems. That this distinction between the problems of, say, South America or Latin America more broadly and the Caribbean, it's a little bit artificial. That the problems that you're referring to, which are essentially the problems of economies that are, you may want to say it

that way, excessively dependent on a few commodities, natural resources.

But at the same time economies are struggling to diversify, to find new areas of employment, for economic activity. Those are the challenges that we hear on this very same stage when we welcome the presidents from the other countries in this hemisphere. And at the same time the challenges are associated with crime, which in many ways connect with the problems of drug trafficking. And for your country it is clear that it's a situation that essentially you have to deal with and that is not generated by the country itself. It reflects a multinational issue and you have to respond with the limited forces that countries have to a problem that is much more global.

So these are common themes that are present in all our conversations with leaders and with governments from the countries across the region. I took particular notice of your remarks in terms of what you were doing with the legislation in Trinidad and Tobago especially in terms of strengthening the rule of law and making sure that the judicial system is stronger to deal with this situation, but there may be other aspects that you may want to comment to as in what you're thinking should be done. I think your comment at the end was also very clear in terms of what needs to be done in the multilateral arena in terms of the trade in arms and weapons.

But there are a number of issues. I also want to highlight your background as an educator that shows very clear in terms of the priorities. And it's really impressive because I think this reflects Trinidad and Tobago's situation in the hemisphere in terms of having the highest per capital income of the entire region, that you have already achieved universal coverage in primary and

secondary locations. But the emphasis on preschool education is so interesting because that's what we're hearing more and more from different governments in the region, an area that was somewhat neglected in the past. But now it's becoming clear that so many things in life depend on what you do in those ages. So it will be very interesting also to hear your approach to this because, again, not just as a leader, as a political leader of a country but with the experience that you have as an educator in your early career, it will be good to know what is the government of Trinidad and Tobago doing to make sure that the kids reach, they achieve this universal coverage in preschool education.

So I guess there are many interesting aspects, all of them resonate outside of Trinidad and Tobago and have an implication for many other countries. How to diversify the economy, how to deal with the issues of crime, and this last point of how to achieve universal preschool education.

But let's open the floor for a few questions and take a couple of comments or questions or comments from the audience. So why don't you begin here, then we'll go to you, and then we'll go to you.

SPEAKER: Thank you. My name is Vinal Parsho. I represent the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the best part of our kingdom, as you know, is it is situated in the Caribbean. As such, we are interested in the security and the economic development of the region.

Last year in Washington the CBSI or Caribbean Basin Security Initiative was launched and your country is playing a major role in this initiative. My question to you is what role do you see for non-CARICOM countries that are represented in the region, such as the Netherlands, but also the U.K. and

France, to make this initiative work?

MR. CARDENAS: Do you want to take questions one by one or should we collect a few?

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Maybe collect a few.

MR. CARDENAS: Maybe collect a few.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: I don't want to forget them. So can I just say to you, sir, I had the great pleasure, distinct honor of meeting the prime minister of Curacao only recently and we spoke very passionately. He came to Trinidad and Tobago to meet us and he spoke very passionately of the Netherlands. Indeed, he said he was the newest nation because he had removed -- Curacao had been removed from the Antilles, is it? Yeah.

But it brought closer to me really how much we are missing out when we concentrate on the English speaking Caribbean and leave out the other islands. We still have so much in common with the non-English speaking ones. And so because of that meeting with the prime minister of Curacao, he has agreed to assist in opening doors for us in the Netherlands in the Dutch speaking CARICOM regions.

How will that impact on the region in terms of security measures? It will take us a bit longer than we have this evening. What I do say is we need to partner with all of us there in that Caribbean basin as a region, whether English-speaking or non-English-speaking. As you know, we work with (inaudible) as part of our CARICOM block but we need to include the others because if we are

to marshal those waters and secure those waters and therefore secure our nation states, then it is important that we have partnerships in the fight against crime.

And we will welcome from you as you represent the Netherlands for the discussions. My ambassador is here and I'm sure we can have further discussions. Our doors are wide open. We are open for business. We are open for new ideas to pave the way really to take all our nations far because when one rises the rest of us will rise as well.

Thank you, sir.

MR. CARDENAS: Can we have your question, the lady behind?

MS. MOTLEY: Good day. I'm Johanna Motley. I'm a Georgetown student and a Trinidadian native. And we had the pleasure of having President Obama speak about energy security on our campus last Wednesday. And while I was watching his speech being broadcast -- I wasn't lucky enough to get a ticket but lucky enough to be here today -- one thing that really resonated with me is his proposal to cut reliance on foreign oil by a third of what it is currently and that's by 2020. So I'm thinking of the implications as he speaks to my oil-based nation. So I was really glad to hear you talk about diversifying our economy. I thought that's, you know, really key in moving forward. But what do you think is the most promising sector of renewable energy currently in Trinidad? What are we looking towards? Is it more wind-based energy? Have we considered biofuels? What really do you think is the most promising approach currently?

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Sure. Solar

energy seems to be a good way to go. As you know, we are a very warm, hot nation and so solar energy is very much on the cards. We're looking at hydro but solar, I think, if I may say may be out front at the moment. And many of the projects as I said before, we are looking to put in solar energized systems and mechanisms in place. Biofuels may be a way to go but we are so very unfortunate when we shut down our sugar industry that we did not think then that we should have gone into the biofuels. Whether it is too late or not, I cannot say. But if I were to answer you right here I would say solar energy. And therefore, you are right. We cannot continue to leave our eggs in the energy basket from the hydrocarbons. We have to have renewable energy. But even more important, the diversification of the economy using that same hydrocarbon sector to launch us into manufacturing and downstreaming other regards.

So thank you and it's lovely to hear a Trinidad voice here in Washington.

(Laughter)

MR. CARDENAS: Thank you. Sir. Yes, thank you.

SPEAKER: Madam Prime Minister, it's a pleasure to have you here and it's really an honor for me. I am a native-born Trinidadian. I share U.S. citizenship as well, and I serve in the Obama administration now in jobs innovation. I am here on my own accord today.

My question to you is what's the unemployment rate in Trinidad? Who is most affected and what's the solution to that?

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: The figures are pretty low. They're not so bad when it comes to unemployment rates but

what we have, what I would say is worse for us is what is known as underemployment, which is to say that persons are not trained or qualified in the areas and arenas where the jobs are. And so the solution is again education and training. I come back to that.

So as unemployment rates -- sir, can you recall what they are?

SPEAKER: Nine percent.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Nine percent.

So we are not into double digits. Nine percent. But the real issue for us, I think, especially in an economy that wants to diversify, we want to be knowledge-driven, so it is an area of underemployment. That is to say the qualifications, the training levels that we need are not in the quantities that are required for driving the economy. Solution? Education, education, education. And training.

Thank you, sir. Another Trinidadian voice, thank you.

MR. CARDENAS: Strobe.

MR. TALBOTT: Madam Prime Minister, thank you again for your generosity of time and also for all the hospitality that you extended to us. Many of us look forward to taking you up on some of those offers.

I hope that your time permits you to take another question or two and Mauricio to call on someone.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Certainly.

MR. TALBOTT: Because I want to ask a question rather in a minor key and it has to do with preparedness for natural disasters. We have seen, of course, two horrible examples of how vulnerable countries are, both in our own hemisphere, in our own neighborhood, in Haiti, and of course, in Japan.

And both of these, of course, started with earthquakes. Part of the United States and the Caribbean region and your country are all on the same fault line. Can you tell us a little bit about how your country would deal with something which we all hope we will be spared?

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: It will not happen.

MR. TALBOTT: Right.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: We hope it will not happen. Yes, I am advised that we are on the same fault line as Haiti. And as we speak, thanks to your wonderful ambassador in Trinidad and Tobago who is here with us today, Ambassador Welters, we are partnering with the U.S. at the moment for an exercise for preparing and planning for earthquake disasters. Madam, would you want to say a little bit more on that for us, please?

MR. CARDENAS: Just wait. We'll get the microphone.

MS. WELTERS: Oh. It's called FA HUM and it's a Spanish version of disaster preparedness.

But right now as we speak there's Canadian defense forces, as well as the U.S. defense forces, as well as the Trinidadian defense forces, are coming together and rolling out an actual, almost an actual earthquake and tsunami where they're going to be closing down the airport, closing down different -- hello. He's a Trini -- closing down the airport for a certain time. Some of the medical facilities, etcetera, etcetera. And this is going to be happening next week. But our forces are there right now, as well as Canadian forces.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Thank you,

madam. Thank you.

MR. CARDENAS: We're going to take two more questions. The lady in the back and then we'll come to you.

SPEAKER: Madam Prime Minister, it's an honor to be in the audience today, especially to hear about the seven pillars of our development. I am a Trinidadian citizen living here in the U.S. and I'm interested in hearing some of your comments about the development of the Caribbean Court of Justice, especially as it relates to the pillar that you mentioned, developing a single market and economy because I know that court will be responsible for regulating the single market and I heard that Trinidad has been pulling out of that development. So I was interested in hearing your comments there.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Sure. At the moment, through domestic legislation Trinidad and Tobago is part of that Caribbean Court of Justice insofar as it relates to the single market and economy. So as we speak we have not pulled out of that. That has been -- it is part of the domestic law, except do you know what is happening? It has not been used, you know, as much as it should be used.

So the CCJ was designed for two purposes. One was to do with being a final court of appeal and the other was in its original jurisdiction, and the original jurisdiction was for interpretation of the Chaguaramas Treaty, which had to do with the single market and economy. That is present in the law of Trinidad and Tobago for interpretation of the treaty and therefore, matters relating to the single market and economy.

Where we did not go was to abolish the Privy Council to have that

as a final court of appeal. And it is my respectful view that yes, we will have to do it one day but at this point in time there are other priorities for us to spend money on. That is to say the crime fighting initiatives, the economic matters. And you might have heard me in London they asked me, and this was a local economist (inaudible) out of this, I am saying the timing, it will happen. It's a question of sovereignty. When it comes to justice, we do have justice. The Privy Council is three strikes you're out, final court of appeal for Trinidad and Tobago for the time being. Should I go spend money now that is much more needed? I have to pay public sector wages. I have to pay prisons, officers. Everybody wants an increase in their wage bill. And so we must prioritize. I'm saying if it's not broken, why spend the money to fix it at a time when our resources are lesser. So, ma'am, I hope that answers you.

MR. CARDENAS: Thank you. Yes, please.

MR. LEWIS: Thank you, Mauricio. David Lewis with Manchester Trade.

Thank you so much, Prime Minister, for being here with us and sharing in your very busy schedule which is very impressive. So congratulations on putting this together.

I'd like to ask you a question on biofuels and ethanol because it's a big debate now in the United States which will affect producers in the Caribbean unbeknownst to most of our governments right now. Two of the nine producers in the Caribbean basin are actually in Trinidad and Tobago and we've got the privilege of representing one of them, which is one of the biggest brands in Trinidad and the world, which is Angostura, which has a bulk trade terminal in

ethanol. And one of the key challenges really is how to incentivize that growth, both ethanol and other biofuels for the export market here in the U.S., but also for domestic consumption in the region. Only Costa Rica and Jamaica have biofuel blending laws right now. So one of the challenges is how do we do that in-country? And I'm hoping that that may be one of the issues that your government can approach. And also here with the U.S. Congress as the debate on ethanol takes place and it could affect the Caribbean Basin Initiative preferences which countries like Trinidad are using very successfully right now. Thank you.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Thank you, sir.

May I say it is a very serious and important issue. My ambassador was trying to brief me in the car from the airport yesterday, but it is something we'll have to give a greater consideration to. I would prefer not to comment, you know, decisively today on that issue because certainly I need to be further briefed and have further discussion with my own cabinet as to the way forward. But it is a red flag for us, sir, and we will give it further consideration. I thank you.

MR. LEWIS: Thank you.

MR. CARDENAS: The last word for the young generations.

SPEAKER: All right. Thank you, Madam Prime Minister, for being here. As a citizen from Trinidad and Tobago myself from Gettysburg College, Pennsylvania, it's a pleasure to be here.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: God bless

that voice, that accent.

(Laughter)

SPEAKER: So I was wondering. You talked about clean energy, and as you know, natural gas is one of our main economies. But should we move to clean energy, I just wanted to ask a couple of questions with regards to is the public ready in terms of a turnover, in terms of both the consumer and the jobs? And also, what will the costs be of the turnover from regular natural gas to alternative energy? You talked about wind and solar energy. I was just wondering if there's any findings with regards to that. Thank you.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Important question which contains two parts. One is are we ready? Is the consumer ready? Supplier or demand? Are we ready? And your second was, I'm sorry, remind me.

SPEAKER: My second question was also --

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Cost.

SPEAKER: Yeah, what's the cost.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Cost, yeah. It is more expensive. Because we are suppliers and producers of the hydrocarbon energy, it is more expensive initially to go into the wind and to go into the solar energy. So in the short term it will cost more but in the medium or obviously the long term, when you put that solar thing up you're not paying any electricity bill for that solar, you know, each week, each month, each year. So initially cost is higher, medium- to long-term on a diminishing scale your costs will become lower. Are we ready? Were we ever ready for anything, anybody,

anywhere in the world? The technology, when it comes, it comes. Were we ready for BlackBerrys and Twitter and Facebook? Were we ever ready? It just hits you in the face.

I remember when we spoke when the early text messaging first started. I was very busy then. We were just into government, it was in '95 and I became a minister. I'm too busy. Management said use this thing. It's so great. These e-mails and the text. I just couldn't find the time to do it. But do you know what? Minister Winston "Gypsy" Peters on Saturday said to me Prime Minister, for the first time I sent a text message to you. (Laughter) So you become ready because you must because it is imperative. We have to be ready because the world will not wait for us. And do you know what? We hold this world in trust. I say it all the time. We do not own it. We hold this earth now, inherited it from our forefathers. We are holding it in trust for our children. And if we fail to do it, then there will be nothing for them to inherit. And so we have to do it. We will be ready. We must be ready.

MR. CARDENAS: Thank you very much.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Thank you very much. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. CARDENAS: Thank you very much.

MR. TALBOTT: I cannot imagine a more appropriate and uplifting last word.

Here is an idea. Since there are a lot of what I have now learned to call Trinis in the audience, may I suggest that everyone who so qualifies

comes up to the front for a group picture? How about that?

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Oh, that would be wonderful.

(Applause)

MR. TALBOTT: And maybe honorary Trinis, too.

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: That's a think tank.

MR. TALBOTT: How about an honorary Trini?

THE HONORABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR: Honorary Trini, yes.

* * * * *

CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

/s/Carleton J. Anderson, III

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2012