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REMARKS BY THE ACTING SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION
OF AMERICAN STATES, AMBASSADOR LUIGI R. EINAUDI,
AT THE INAUGURAL CEREMONY

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The first meeting of American Heads of State and Government attended by a Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago was held in Uruguay in April 1967. That was a little less than two months after Trinidad and Tobago had been admitted as a full member of the OAS and one week after Trinidad and Tobago had signed the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance. The Prime Minister, Dr Eric Williams, was emphatic at Punta del Este that among the convictions that had influenced his country's entry into the OAS was that, and I quote him, "We considered that hemispheric security was indispensable to our security and we considered it our responsibility to contribute to hemispheric solidarity".

Thirty eight years later, it is at least symbolic that this Fifth Regular Session of the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism is taking place in Port-of-Spain with Uruguay as the outgoing Chair and Trinidad and Tobago the incoming Chair.

In this happy light, CICTE V is a reaffirmation of the commitment of Trinidad and Tobago to the security of the Hemisphere -- and of the commitment of the Americas as whole -- to solidarity in the fight against a threat whose insidious nature the Heads of State and Government who met in Uruguay in 1967 could not have imagined.

Today, among the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Heads of Government, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago has responsibility for crime and security. I had occasion to meet briefly with Prime Minister Manning yesterday as he left for the Sixteenth Inter-Sessional Meeting of Heads of Government of CARICOM, in Paramaribo, Suriname. The OAS is grateful to Prime Minister Manning, to you, Minister Joseph, and to your Government for Trinidad and Tobago's commitment, for your initiatives in guiding the agenda and preparations for this session, for your willingness to share your experience and lessons learnt with us all. We deeply appreciate the work of the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of National Security, its CICTE Office, under Mr. Overand Padmore, the dedication of your Principal Representative, National Coordinator and staff, and the excellent arrangements put in place for this meeting

Thus it is that I am very pleased to help open this Fifth Regular Session of CICTE. It has been a source of great satisfaction to see CICTE mature since September 11th, 2001 into an internationally-recognized model of counter terrorism cooperation and capacity-building. The Member States have shown the commitment to design practical programs to strengthen the safety of the people of the Americas. I wish to recognize publicly the CICTE Secretariat and the National Points of Contact for their work.

The Americas themselves have been gratefully spared the devastation of major attacks since the tragedies of 2001, but we cannot rest on our laurels. The Madrid attacks eleven months ago, like the 2002 bombings in Bali, a major tourist destination, and a series of deadly explosions elsewhere in the Philippines just this past Monday, all demonstrate that seemingly safe areas far removed from zones of active conflict are not immune.

How do we judge if our strategies are effective? The threat is insidious precisely because we can never be sure that we have done enough. The CICTE work plan ambitiously calls for action in several critical areas, including border controls, money laundering and cyber security. Yet obtaining action in the absence of a visibly clear and present danger can be difficult, particularly in the face of competing demands for resources, which we face in all our countries.

The Member States negotiated, signed, and brought into force the Inter-American Convention against Terrorism with record speed. With all thirty four countries as signatories it is an important expression of solidarity. With 12 States Party now, it has become a critical legal framework authorizing cooperation within a framework of international law and human rights. Now that the required ratifications have been deposited, I will shortly convene a consultation among the States Party.

Two things need to happen now.

First, member states which have not yet done so should make every effort to ratify the Convention as soon as possible. The states that have ratified come from every part of the hemisphere, with two countries from the Caribbean and four from Central America joining four from South America and two from North America. Cooperation against terrorism is for everyone, regardless of size, geographic location, or ideology.

Second, all member states should take the steps necessary to harmonize the provisions of this treaty and of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1373 with their own national legislation. The CICTE Secretariat and the U.N. Office of Drug Control have worked closely with Member States to identify problems and to solve them in conformity with both national and international law.

In these last few days, at the request of the Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines, the General Secretariat, through its Department of Democratic and Political Affairs and with the collaboration of CICTE, has been coordinating with the Attorney General of St Vincent and the Grenadines the organization of a "Conference on Legislative Action against Terrorism." The Conference would be held at the end of May 2005 in Kingstown, St. Vincent, and its purpose will be to analyze legislation to combat terrorism in each of the OECS countries that are also members of the OAS.

In several states, however, implementing legislation has stalled. Countering terrorism does not always receive the priority it should. The criminalization of the terrorist acts enumerated in the Convention is not controversial. The Declarations of San Salvador and Montevideo emphatically condemn them, and the Convention defines defenses fully consistent with human rights.

We must find ways to reward cooperation and information sharing at all levels of government. The Symposium on Border Management held last year in Vancouver, Canada, under the auspices of the OAS, demonstrated that increased security can be achieved without negative effects on trade and development, especially when neighboring countries jointly plan and execute improvements.

And this is where you are key. It is your work that will foster and strengthen the indispensable culture of cooperation. No one country has all of the answers to improving the security of our citizens against the threats posed by terrorists, who seek to exploit the rules of civilized society. The answer is not to abandon our rules, or to wink at abuses of the rights of suspects. Respect for human rights is essential – even to good intelligence—and civilized practice, if it is to evolve, will emerge from your collective wisdom and experience. Knowledge shared multiplies, and when it is shared among partners, it increases for the common good.

Improving coordination was as important as reducing costs in the recent reforms of the structure of the General Secretariat of the OAS. We are moving away from the highly decentralized structure that had evolved over the past decade to a new structure within which the CICTE Secretariat falls within a broader Department of Multidimensional Security, which is charged with integrating the many issues affecting security in our times. As we do our best to carry out the mandates we receive from the various political bodies, including this one, my hope is that we will be both more efficient and more comprehensive. It is no accident that the new multidimensional approach to hemispheric security found its first full expression in the Declaration of Bridgetown, issued by the OAS General Assembly which took place in Barbados in June 2002 – the same Assembly that adopted the Inter-American Convention against Terrorism. Our struggle against terrorism will be enhanced by deepening democracy and increasing opportunity for all.

Let me close by again commending CICTE on the progress made since 2001. The increasing number of requests for CICTE to provide technical assistance and mentoring to counter-terrorism bodies in other organizations and regional bodies should be a source of pride. However, I charge you to shape the next steps. Terrorism, whatever its origin or motivation, has no justification. It constitutes an attack on the values and principles that underlie both regional and international order and the democratic institutions and freedoms to which we all aspire. And as the Trinidad and Tobago motto reminds us, it is really only together that we can best aspire and achieve.