Address by
the Honourable Bridgid Annisette-George Speaker of the House of Representatives, Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Vice-President of ParlAmericas

OAS Permanent Council
February 2nd, 2022

Good morning. My name is Bridgid Mary Annisette-George, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Vice President of ParlAmericas.

- Chairman of the Permanent Counsel of the Organization of American States, Ambassador Warren Everson Alarick Hull, Permanent Representative of St Kitts and Nevis,
- Secretary General Luis Almagro,
- Assistant Secretary General Nester Mendez
- Ambassador Anthony Phillips-Spencer of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
- Distinguished Ambassadors,

Your Excellences,

It is an honour to address you as Vice-President of ParlAmericas.

From the moment we take our oaths of office as Parliamentarians, we commit to fulfill our roles as representatives and advocates of our constituents, as overseers of the executives, and as lawmakers who demand, promote and create the regulatory frameworks that will tangibly improve the lives of our populations. We are acutely aware that for us to effectively accomplish our roles, the safeguarding of a healthy planet and maintaining sustainable national economies are fundamental if not critical. Our mandate therefore is not an inconsequential one.
For the past 20 years, through ParlAmericas, Parliamentarians from across the Americas and the Caribbean have come together, ready to dialogue on and explore solutions to the complex challenges which confront our hemisphere. As noted by our President, Senator Ovelar, the concerns which our members share encompass but are by no means limited to concerns over worsening social inequities, labour markets that undervalue the work of many women and men, a climate crisis that requires far more ambitious prevention and mitigation measures and adaptation support, the numerous threats posed by disinformation, and an increasing disconcerting and potentially destructive loss of confidence in public institutions.

As representatives of the Executive and Legislators, we, who are here, are well-aware that robust democracies are built on the separate, but interconnected, powers of our Legislative, Executive, and Judicial branches. The balances built into our respective functions allow us to govern harmoniously, and with the will of the People not only at the heart, but at the forefront, of decision-making processes.

We Legislators have a crucial responsibility to ensure effective budget expenditures, to pass fair laws, and to oversee policies and programmes produced by the Executive branch. If you permit the analogy, we see ourselves as responsible for the choreography that shapes the government’s performance, meeting the needs and expectations of an audience - the public - who is deeply engrossed in the actions on stage, and ready to critique when their expectations of performance are unmet.

Given the uncertainties and polarizations that currently characterize our world and more particularly our Hemisphere, it is more urgent than ever that the actions of our branches (Executive and Legislature) are well coordinated and our institutional ties are strong. Our channels of communication must be open and regular. An ongoing exchange between our branches of Government – in such high-level spaces as this – represents an essential opportunity to strengthen democratic dialogue and to transform it into meaningful action.
For this reason, ParlAmericas, tracks the commitments that our Governments assume and raises awareness around those commitments. This allows our members to design, advance and oversee frameworks for the successful implementation of Governments’ commitments. We therefore value the agreements reached by the various bodies that encompass the Organization of American States, and we dialogue on their implications. These agreements are indeed roadmaps for progress in our hemisphere.

ParlAmericas additionally facilitates parliamentary engagement in our hemisphere on the agreements assumed at the international level through U.N. fora, such as the Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Commission on the Status of Women.

In turn, our own parliamentary debates and outputs reference important interactions with Executive authorities and processes; the inter-parliamentary delegations that convene at ParlAmericas’ meetings adopt political declarations that identify clear actions to guide our work in our respective parliaments. Within these parliamentary declarations are our own calls to action: for our governments to take coherent actions towards the fulfillment of commitments made.

To this end, we invite you to take note of some of the key recommendations in the inter-parliamentary declarations we have released this past year: greater investments in social and environmental protections; stronger mechanisms for citizen participation; and policies to guarantee the health, wellbeing and prosperity of our people, grounded solidly in human rights, and responsive to the realities of our rapidly-changing and increasingly-digitized world.

I can also personally attest to the practical value of ParlAmericas’ specialized guidance and resources at a national level. As the Speaker of the House of Representatives for the past seven years, I have had a privileged view of the positive impact of ParlAmericas’ work on my Parliament.
In the interest of time, I offer two examples. Being committed to taking steps towards the adoption of gender budgeting in my country, I was able to rely on ParlAmericas to support us with resources and connect us with specialists. Further, in the coming weeks, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will also be offering a workshop for all parliamentarians on Circular Economy with ParlAmericas, which will allow us to strengthen our knowledge base on transitioning our economic models for a greener future.

My Parliament also joined ParlAmericas and CIWiL, Caribbean Women in Leadership, in offering a program that empowered young women from a diverse of backgrounds and giving them skills and confidence to be transformational leaders in their communities. Two cohorts of young women have since filled the seats of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, contributing their voices through rigorously prepared, evidence-based political debate from a gender-responsive and inclusive perspective, leaving me very inspired and hopeful for our future as a country with such impressive up and coming political leaders. I was heartened to see this program being taken up by the Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda, with forthcoming iterations in Saint Lucia and other parliaments in the region.

It is worth noting that since ParlAmericas was created 20 years ago, it has evolved into a working space that is highly regarded among the parliaments of CARICOM countries. Currently, there is the highest representation in our institution’s history of Caribbean parliamentarians on the ParlAmericas Board. It speaks volumes that it is the presiding officers of Caribbean parliaments who occupy these seats on our Board – this is testimony that ParlAmericas’ work is both valued and relevant to our reality as Small Island States.

I am certain that you will agree that we are at an unprecedented and critical juncture in our hemisphere’s history. Leaning into the productive multilateral spaces at our disposal will help us to approach the challenges and opportunities before us with a collaborative, collective mindset.
This year’s theme for the Summit of the Americas, “Building a Sustainable, Resilient, and Equitable Future” invites us to ensure that no one is left behind in political decision-making of any type, and that our actions today are not compromising to the health of our planet or to future generations.

As members of the Legislatures of the Americas and the Caribbean, we affirm our dedication to this vision for the future. I am pleased to say that ParlAmericas’ work is well-aligned to contribute to a strong foundation for its achievement.

On this basis, we wish to propose that our exchanges in OAS spaces become more frequent, and seek to further strengthen the relationship between our organizations in the decades to come.

I thank you for your attention.