

Transcript of pre-CHOGM press conference on 26 November 2009

Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Patrick Manning and Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamallesh Sharma

1. **Prime Minister Manning:** (Inaudible start) ----but the business segment has also gone very well. It has been the largest business segment we have had in any Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. We had over a 1000 participants from not just over the Commonwealth but also the western hemisphere and the rest of the world. There has been a lot of networking and things seem to be going quite well. The Heads have begun to arrive in Trinidad and Tobago beginning with Caricom leaders, many of them came in yesterday for a caucus yesterday, others are coming in today and we are set for the Queen's arrival this evening. Her majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness Prince Phillip will be coming in at about ten minutes to three from Bermuda together with the British Prime Minister and British Foreign Minister and other Heads.

1.1. Tomorrow morning we begin the opening ceremony at ten o'clock at the new spanking new national academy for the performing arts building which I will invite you to have a very close look at. My dear friends if I am just to repeat what was said by the Chief Executive Officer of the Shanghai Construction Company that built it. He said it exceeds in technology the Sydney Opera House, it exceeds the cultural centre in Shanghai and it exceeds the national theatre in Beijing, those were his words.

1.2. On the conference itself we have a number of very important items on the agenda and I imagine the one that is attracting the most domestic and international attention at this time is the whole question of climate change and for that purpose we are going to have a special executive session on Friday after the opening ceremony and for that purpose also we have invited some none Caricom leaders the very distinguished Secretary General of the United Nations Bank Ki-moon will be here. The Director General of the UN FCC he is also going to be here. The Prime Minister of Denmark the chair of the Copenhagen meeting he is going to be here, Prime Minister Lars Rasmussen and also the President of France, President Sarkozy. They will be associated with us in our discussions on climate change, and we hope by the added weight of these voices together with the voices from the Commonwealth we hope to arrive at a political statement that can add value to the process that will culminate in Copenhagen early next month.

1.3. In addition to that the Civil Society Forum is off – I've said - The Youth Forum. We also have on the agenda the question of none communicable diseases which arises out of an engagement in Caricom two years ago where we had a Summit for the first time in Port of Spain. There was a Port of Spain declaration on none communicable diseases and we took note of the rising importance of none communicable diseases in the life span of individuals both in the region and elsewhere and the need not only to bring this to the attention of domestic audiences and domestic populations, but since it is of a worldwide nature we believe we ought to gain worldwide attention and we are proposing a summit of the highest level under the auspices of the United Nations. Those are two critical issues that we have on the agenda. I am sure that there are others but I think I have spoken enough; we have the very distinguished Secretary General with us.

2 Secretary General Kamallesh Sharma: Prime Minister thank you very much it has been a marathon which we have been running and we are now in the stadium, on the home stretch ... I want to express my appreciation to you personally for the excess you have always given to our teams, to myself and I think the results are there to show for it and it was a marathon but I think we have entered the stadium now and shortly we are going to run up to the finishing line, and this much I would like to say about Trinidad and Tobago as a host country. It's not an easy thing for a small country to take a huge investment decision of this nature.

2.1. The specialty I think of the Commonwealth, although it is an organisation of small member states; small member states do take this decision. But more than that, it is a huge investment in political will and faith in the Commonwealth in what the Commonwealth can achieve. So I hope that Prime Minister the people here would recognise that the world's knowledge, that the world's experience and opportunity of coming to Trinidad and Tobago, more than five thousand people and in a globalising world we cannot afford to be detached from the rest. It's an investment in the future. The preparations are as complete as they could ever be. As chair Prime Minister you would be able to guide the Commonwealth in the two years to come in the directions you feel appropriate for the Commonwealth whose ethos in any case is based on inclusiveness. I am being particularly mindful of the interests of small states.

2.2. As for the issues coming up, the Prime Minister has mentioned some. We are in an organization of our times, always have been an organization of the times in which we have existed and in the work we will be doing, we will be expressing ourselves as an organization of values. This is the 60th anniversary of the modern Commonwealth looking forward for the network of election commissioners. Our Commonwealth Ministerial group can enhance its work in issues like that. We would be looking at partnership, which is the theme of Prime Minister Manning, equitable sustainable partnership.

2.3. We will be looking at the youth particularly what value can we bring to them. What resource can we bring in options that are given to member states. In what way can we do their skills development coherence which is required in the work of the youth and how partnership can be further advanced by means such as using the technology that is now available and making a network in which all the strands of our corporation can be incorporated.

2.4. With these words I think I will stop and Prime Minister we can take some questions.

3. Conference Spokesperson Eduardo del Buey: Thank you gentlemen if you will, we have time for a few questions.

4. Questions from the Media:

4.1. Newsday: Prime Minister, could you indicate to us, you mentioned some of the issues to be addressed at the CHOGM, but how will the CHOGM also address issues such as the controversial statements by the President of Gambia against human rights, against persons in his country which seems to be creating some furor among other member states and also a recent anti homosexuality bill which is causing some concerns between Uganda and Canada. How would the CHOGM address those types of issues or seek to address them and in so doing not lose sight of some of the other objectives that it hopes to achieve.

4.2. **Response from Prime Minister Manning:** Well the statement by the Gambian President essentially related to domestic matters in Gambia and really forms no part of the agenda of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. I have no doubt that it is a statement that attracted a lot of attention at home and abroad but is not part of the agenda really it need not detain us. In the same way the statement by the Ugandans, the statement in Uganda to which reference has been made is also again a matter of domestic Ugandan policy and really not a matter for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. I have no doubt that in the individual countries people have their own positions on these matters, but again that does not form part of the agenda in the way we perceive it.

4.3. **Secretary General Kamalesh Sharma:** Can I just add something Prime Minister.

4.4. **Prime Minister Manning:** Yes.

4.5. **Secretary General Kamalesh Sharma:** I'd just like to add a lot of Commonwealth voices have been raised in recent comments. One point is clear as far as the Commonwealth is concerned – Secretariat. Respect for human rights is a core Commonwealth feature, and I'd like to say we are in discussions with the Gambian side and this continues. As far as the question about Uganda was concerned, this is the question before the parliament, and I am hopeful that the various voices that are exchanged within the Parliament when this issue is debated will bring forward all the considerations that are relevant such as none discrimination, vulnerability and so on. Parliamentary constitution is something which is strongly supported by us and I think we must show our faith that this is the process which is going to then deliver in the end the appropriate result.

4.6. **Reuters News Agency:** Can I ask both the Prime Minister – (inaudible).--The political statements you hoped to deliver before Copenhagen, what kind of statement can you qualify – a little more specific about what kind of statement you hope will emerge here. What kind of effect you think it will have on Copenhagen and why is the Commonwealth voice is important on this debate on climate change specifically?

4.7. **Prime Minister Patrick Manning:** Let me answer the last aspect of the question first. The Commonwealth comprises at this time fifty-one countries who are eligible to attend this Commonwealth Heads of Government conference meeting, comprising of countries from both the developed world and some of the largest polluters, to countries that are small and threatened by the effects of climate change and therefore a statement from countries as diverse as those you would find in the Commonwealth is a statement that would be much more reflective of a world opinion than would otherwise be the case in other agglomerations with which we are familiar. Secondly, in a sense the question you have asked seeks to pre-judge the contributions that would be made in the summit by the individual countries. One thing that would not happen is that we will not engage in any negotiations in Port of Spain. There is a negotiating process under the auspices of the United Nations. That process has been ongoing for some time and will come to a head next month in Copenhagen under the distinguish chairmanship of the Prime Minister of Denmark.

We cannot interject CHOGM into a negotiating process. A process that was not contemplated when this meeting was called in the first place. What we can do is to raise our voices politically and having regard to our own diversity here and the extent to which we represent some two billion people in the world a political statement out of CHOGM is not a statement one can take lightly, it comes with the weight of so many countries, so many people and therefore we feel we have some effect on the influence in the directions the discussions go in Denmark.

I am anxiously awaiting the comments myself in the Heads of Government meeting and I am arising out of what the heads say that we will fashion a statement. What are their views? Trinidad and Tobago has its own views in this matter and our voices will undoubtedly be heard. We will raise our voices in the meeting itself, but then we will be one of fifty-one, so we will just have to wait to hear what the other fifty have to say.

4.8. Washington Correspondent for the Australia newspaper (Brad Norrington): Its most unusual for the Prime Minister of Denmark, the President of France to attend I believe its possible the Secretary General of the UN has attended before and before but not in the realm as participants at a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Could you comment, is this Prime Minister your own initiative to have invited these Heads of Government outside the Commonwealth and could you explain a little about how that took place. Was the approach directly made from you and how did they actually become participants at the Commonwealth for the climate session.

4.9. Prime Minister Patrick Manning: The invitation did come from the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and it followed discussions I held with both the Secretary General of the UN and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Following those discussions, we decided to go in a particular direction because it was felt especially at the time, that there was some concern about the direction in which the negotiations were going in respect of culminating in Copenhagen next month.

We also thought that we can add value and add weight to the voice of the Commonwealth countries if other Commonwealth agencies and countries might have been associated with us. The Prime Minister of Denmark, Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen is in fact the Chairman of club fifteen in Copenhagen. The Secretary General of the UN - It is under the auspices of the UN that all of these discussions are taking place, and the President of France as somebody who had a point of view which he wanted to express to the Commonwealth Heads Meeting here in Port of Spain and which we thought could have been of great interest to us and which could assist us in no small measure in coming to our own conclusions on this matter. That basically is how it came about.

4.10. Question from member of media (inaudible):

4.11. Prime Minister Patrick Manning: I couldn't talk for the President of the United States. I was aware that there was some talk along those lines but then as of now, that is not the case.

4.12. Question from member of media (inaudible): Prime Minister Manning, notwithstanding what you said about negotiations, not negotiations, discussions with regard to the political statement having to take place, but I am sure that Trinidad and Tobago and CARICOM and

indeed the smaller states have some particular concerns that they would like to see reflected in that political statement. Can you tell us a couple of those things please?

4.13. Prime Minister Patrick Manning: First of all the chairman of office of CARICOM is the very distinguished President of Guyana who is authorized to speak on behalf of the CARICOM countries, he would have discussed the climate issue. We have discussed it, the CARICOM countries are small territories all of whom are affected one way or the next by this issue of climate change and in particular the ferocity and regularity of hurricanes that we are now experiencing in the Caribbean area that have devastated not one but several of the countries of the region. So it is a source of concern to us. We have a clear position that has been outlined. I would prefer to leave the details of it, in fact it is no different from the position of the OECS (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States) countries the smaller island states of the world the chairman who incidentally is the Prime Minister of Grenada and who will be making a statement at the special segment on climate change on behalf of the AOSIS (Alliance of Small States) countries. But those positions are very well known and the need to curtail the rise in temperatures, curtail the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the need for a time frame in which to do all of this, the need for the use of whatever mechanisms are available to do it and so on and so on. That story is well known. I just wish to advise that the position of the CARICOM countries is no different from that to which you have already become accustomed.

4.13. Conference Spokesperson Eduardo del Buey: Last question James Robins.

4.14: James Robins from the BBC: Prime Minister can you tell us if there is anything that gives you confidence that a Commonwealth outcome on climate change will do more than frankly reflect the deep divisions that exist within the Commonwealth about the way forward as a microcosm of the deep divisions within the world which have already led to much lowered expectations of the Copenhagen outcome and the acceptance that it is not going to be able to put hard figures on it, in other words really would we just see a reflection of the wider global divisions in whatever emerges in this meeting, more particularly about your own country, about Trinidad in terms of emissions per capita, the measure preferred for instance by the Chinese, Trinidad is within the top ten emitters per capita in the world. Do you have something to explain? Do you have a case to make in your own defense?

4.15: Prime Minister Patrick Manning: Let me deal with the second part of your question first. When the earth responds to concentrations of green house gases in the atmosphere, it does not do so on a per capita basis it does it on the basis of absolute emissions. Therefore for Trinidad and Tobago categorically rejects any analysis of this matter on a per capita basis and of course it is a convenient argument for countries with large populations.

The population of China is 1.3 billion people. The population of Trinidad is 1.3 million people. China's population is one thousand times the size of the population of Trinidad and Tobago, and when we look at the question of absolute emissions, China is the largest emitter in the world followed by the United States that's the reality of the situation. Therefore the per capita argument is one that we consider unsustainable and one that Trinidad and Tobago categorically rejects. We are looking at the absolute emissions yes.

We are an industrialized country. We have eleven ammonia plants, we have seven methanol plants, we have an iron and steel smelter, we have four power stations run on natural gas and so

on. Yes we are an industrialized country and yes Trinidad and Tobago has to concern itself about the extent to which we have been making a negative contribution to this climate change matter. And we have already made it clear that whatever agreements are arrived at, Trinidad and Tobago understands its responsibilities to the international community and to its own population and on a voluntary basis Trinidad and Tobago is going to seek to do something about it. Right now I can tell you a policy document is before the cabinet on the whole question of climate change and early next year we will make some comprehensive announcements on this matter.

4.16: **Prime Minister Patrick Manning:** What was the other question?

4.17: **Inaudible response from the media:**

4.18: **Prime Minister Patrick Manning:** Well first of all it is not going to be a negotiating session removes a lot of the divisions from the discussion. It's not a negotiating session. It is a session designed to discuss and to see how we can add value to a process that has been ongoing for some time and which in the eyes of some is threatening to flounder, and certainly threatening not to have the successful and amicable conclusion that was contemplated when Copenhagen was put together. In that context therefore the fifty-one countries meeting from various sides of the spectrum of the climate change spectrum, there is an opportunity for some kind of meeting of the minds on the way forward in such a way that we can add value to the outcome of club fifteen in Copenhagen. We look forward to it with great anticipation.

5. **Conference Spokesperson Eduardo del Buey:** Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen we will see you this evening around 8:30 this evening for the conclusion of the Foreign Minister's meeting in the Press Conference there.