



VIRTUAL PLATFORM OF THE SUMMITS OF THE AMERICAS

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PROMOTING HUMAN PROSPERITY

(Report of the Virtual Forum held from October 1-10, 2008)

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I. Introduction

The Summits of the Americas Secretariat launched the Summits Virtual Platform on September 8th, 2008, in coordination with the OAS/SEDI Department of Human Development, through the Educational Portal of the Americas and with support of the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas / International Development Research Centre (IDRC/ICA). In preparation for the Fifth Summit of the Americas, the Summits Secretariat will carry out a series of virtual fora in key thematic areas of the Draft Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain.

The main objective of the virtual fora is to open a space to promote the participation of different social actors in the Summits Process by using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The results of the fora are presented for the consideration of the National Secretariat, National Coordinators and Permanent Missions during the negotiation of the text of the Declaration to be undertaken in the framework of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) meetings. In addition, the results will be published online and will be utilized as reference material by the social actors that participate in the face-to-face meetings that are being coordinated by the Summits Secretariat.

This report summarizes the main comments and recommendations gathered from the forum “Promoting Human Prosperity”, held from October 1st to 10th, 2008. In elaborating this report, information was assembled into subthemes and, to the extent possible, into the following divisions: (i) priorities for social actors in each area; (ii) proposed action strategies; (iii) main comments on the Declaration, and (iv) suggestions to the language and text of the Declaration.

II. Main comments and recommendations

After ten days of dialogue and exchanges on eight sub-themes that have an impact on the promotion of human prosperity, such as: poverty reduction and economic growth; labor and employment; food security; health; education; youth; knowledge-based society, and culture. The following paragraphs highlight the main comments and recommendations that emerged:

- It is considered necessary to explicitly recognize the role that social actors play as an interface between the government and the people. The forum calls for the region’s governments to encourage the participation of social actors, such as NGOs, in the Summits of the Americas Process.
- Social actors emphasize the need to establish specific actions to promote inter-sector alliances that include government, academia, the private sector and media, in order to strengthen coordination and promote joint efforts.
- Participants insisted on the need to promote corporate social responsibility initiatives as to increase access to and qualitatively improve private sector’s participation in areas such as health, education and knowledge-based society.
- It is necessary that governments go beyond expressing their commitment through this Declaration. Social actors claim that this declaration be paralleled with political will and the identification of the necessary resources to achieve the goals set forth within.

The following section highlights comments made during the virtual forum on subthemes addressed in specific paragraphs of the Draft Declaration:

1. Poverty reduction and economic growth – (paragraphs 5-7)

- Priorities for social actors in this area: Some of the main exchanges related to the governments' action plan to reduce poverty and stimulate economic growth mention the need to better articulate the efforts between governments and social actors, particularly Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). This articulation is expected to contribute to achieving high levels of transparency in governmental actions, as well as a better implementation of development plans as their coordination with peoples' problems would be enhanced.

- Proposed action strategies: The convenience to empower and strengthen social actors was emphasized, as they are strategic stakeholders in the design and implementation of the commitments established in the Declaration. It is also advocated that there be greater participation and collaboration of governments with the private sector and international organizations.

“The draft commitment ought to deal directly with the strengthening of civil society with specific reference to NGOs. The role of Civil Society in governance and democratic processes ought to begin to evolve from the ambiguous, hit and miss, taken-for-granted position it now holds to one that is much more concrete and clearly spelt out”

*Karen Bart-Alexander, Trinidad and Tobago
Gayap Violence Prevention Peace and Love Movement*

- On the Declaration: There is a need to introduce in the Declaration actions to prevent the recurrence of the banking crisis that is currently being experienced throughout the world. In this regard, it was proposed to create adequate regulating entities responsible for monitoring and protecting financial systems. In addition, the importance of continuing to work towards regional economic integration was also highlighted. Calls have been made for the definition of trade policies that could be implemented in order to ignite growth, employment and development, while keeping in mind the different levels of development of each country.

Other participant contributions mentioned the causal relationship between various issues and the reduction of poverty, such as education, human rights, climate change and access to universal civil registry. Particular recommendations include: the need to strengthen education systems as the main tools to provide long-term development alternatives; the need to respect and guarantee human rights, and the importance of recognizing that phenomenon such as climate change and natural disasters should be addressed in national development plans and in poverty reduction strategies.

Civil society Readers are increasingly concern that the strategies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals focus too mucho n economic growth as a catalyst for development and ignore the human aspect. For example, we ask ourselves is there a link between climate change and poverty?

*Gia Gaspard, Trinidad and Tobago
International Education and Resource Network Trinidad and Tobago (iEARNtT)*

2. Labor and employment – (paragraphs 8-13)

- Priorities for social actors in this area: The discussions related to the promotion of decent work, suggest, among others, that there is a need to design programs that increase employment possibilities for people coming out of situations involving their isolation, whether this isolation was due to judicial or mental health problems. Ensuring adequate job access to persons with disabilities was stressed, as was the

need to provide greater work opportunities for rural populations, especially through the establishment of micro-business models.

“...In order to achieve equality in matters of labor and employment, Heads of State need to have political will to take action, we already have a base such as national laws, international conventions, technical tools and experts, besides we already know what we need to change”

*Maritza Melara, El Salvador
Consultant on Human Rights*

- On the Declaration: The feasibility of achieving the goals included in regard to the eradication of child and forced labor was questioned; as were the efforts towards reducing the role of the informal economy and providing wider access to labor markets, especially pertaining to jobs in the formal economy.

“...It is urgent for the rural communities of our countries to transform their social and educational context, with the support of peasant women as important members of the community”

*Dr. Francisco Blanco, Mexico
Foundation for Development of Veracruz, A.C*

Finally, there was reference to paragraph 13 as it relates to intellectual property laws. Emphasis was placed on the need to consider the different levels of development of each country in the region when undertaking the design, harmonization and enforcement of intellectual property laws. A particular concern is that this may have a negative impact not only on the access to medication in developing countries, but also on the level of protection of traditional indigenous knowledge.

- Suggestions to the language and text: In paragraph 10, it was repeatedly suggested to include “worst forms of child labour”.

3. Food security – (paragraphs 14-15)

- Priorities for social actors in this area: The need to establish concrete actions to address the challenge of ensuring food supplies for all citizens in the region was stressed. Participants also presented a concern regarding a high dependency on relatively few sources of food and the lack of control on production, which may impact human health, particularly due to the consumption of foods with high levels of chemicals, preservatives and genetically altered foods.

- Proposed action strategies: Some of the suggestions discussed include the promotion of alliances with young people to work the land and create agricultural businesses; to ensure crop sales to promote the agricultural sector; to design inter-sector strategies to ensure delivery of supplies and facilitate logistical management, and to support the creation of home-based harvests and self-provisions.

“Food security must therefore be about self-sufficiency in food; or at least as close to it as possible, leaving very little room for imported foods. Starting with self-sufficiency in the home, then the community and then nationally. When you grow your own food, you know what you eat.”

*Roosevelt O. King, Barbados
Barbados Association of NGOs*

- On the Declaration: The question as to how realistic the goal to reduce by 50% the number of undernourished people by 2015 was underscored, particularly considering the continuous price increases of food supplies, the crisis of access to those supplies and the famines that continue to occur around the world.

- Suggestions to the language and text: A change was proposed to the last sentence of paragraph 14, this involved adding: “to halve the number of undernourished people by 2015, *particularly boys and girls from 0 to 6 years of age and pregnant women*”. It was argued that scientific and empirical evidence demonstrates that the first six years of a human being’s life is of significant importance to their subsequent development and there are very harmful consequences for new-born babies that have been afflicted by undernourishment during pregnancy.

4. Health – (paragraphs 16-23)

- Priorities for social actors in this area: The contributions related to health were mostly based on the need to reduce the costs of medication and treatment of HIV/AIDS. It was also stated that it is important to promote both ongoing training of health personnel, and to promote medical research. This would guarantee the sustainable delivery of medical treatments and the adequate supply of specialized personnel at a national level.

- Proposed action strategies: The establishments of funds to finance the costs related to HIV/AIDS was proposed. Also, the significance of creating preventive and sexual education programs was noted, particularly targeted to youth, persons with disabilities, as well as rural and indigenous populations. This approach is expected to contribute to reducing current levels of sexually-transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancy.

Additionally, the need to establish inter-institutional networks was mentioned, which would promote dialogue between governments and civil society as a mechanism to achieve a real commitment in the design and implementation of a joint agenda in the area of health. As to better benefit from the created synergies, it was proposed that a monitoring instrument be established to avoid corruption and to ensure compliance with the action plans.

“There are different global networks and fora for NGOs that work in the area of HIV. A few months ago we met at the UN to analyze the lack of timely State policies...Countries themselves have elaborated a very poor report on the current policies related to the commitments for 2010. There is not one country in the region complying with the principle of Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV and AIDS (GIPA). The discrimination of people living with HIV is critical...today, NGOs that work with HIV have the “Latin Observatory of AIDS for AIDS”, where we are informed of what is new in the region. We also have UNAIDS”.

*Martha Inés Miravete, Argentina
Group of Women of Argentina- Observatory*

Finally, it was suggested that the inclusion of the private sector through corporate social responsibility initiatives be promoted, not only to facilitate better working conditions, quality employment and risk prevention, but also to allow for the integral management of the health sector.

“By promoting healthy lifestyles we should gain control over diseases such as AIDS and issues such as teen-age pregnancy. However, this will only be achieved by committing those that comprise the State – the population. Governments change; it is the society that remains”.

*Thelma Itzel Aizpurua, Panama
SEDISCAP -Technical Secretariat for the Program of Action of the
Decade of the Americas for the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities*

5. Education – (paragraphs 24-26)

- Priorities for social actors in this area: The forum’s participants placed great importance on prioritizing the improvement of the quality of education. The main means to reach this goal include ensuring initial preparation of teachers and ongoing teacher training, as well as periodic assessments that contribute to teachers’ professional development and that ensure quality of education for new generations.

Similarly, the urgency of guaranteeing access to education to all vulnerable groups was underscored. Vulnerable groups were suggested to include persons with disabilities, senior citizens, rural populations, immigrants, indigenous groups and individuals isolated in penitentiary institutions.

“Successfully accommodating the diversity expressed through our multicultural and multifaith communities is challenging. Significant effort is going into education in targeted programs such as Language Schools, anti racism and anti bullying strategies and in the promotion of the message that safe and harmonious schools will have better learning outcomes.”

*Gary Shaw, Australia
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development*

- Proposed action strategies: Once again, the creation of inter-sector alliances was advocated as a way to contribute to the improvement of the design, implementation and monitoring of education policies. It is imperative to strengthen the links between the public and private sectors of academia as a means to energize educational processes and encourage the development of social research.

- Suggestions to the language and text: It was suggested that stress be placed on the relevance of early childhood development, considering that it is during the first six years of life that physical, emotional and intellectual structures are developed. This is used as justification for the following revision proposed for paragraph 24: “...Improving early childhood care and education, *chiefly between 0 and 6 years of age*, primary education and teacher training are essential approaches to achieving universal primary education by 2010.”

Regarding paragraph 26, it was suggested that the last sentence be deleted as it appears to be tacked on and does not add any meaning or value to the theme of the paragraph, which is access to education. This sentence mentions quite vaguely one fundamental aspect needed to achieve the targets established in the Declaration, such as the ongoing professional development of teachers. As a substitution for this sentence, an additional paragraph is presented: *“Recognizing also that education is key to sustainable development, increased competitiveness, the alleviation of poverty and enhancement of the quality of life of all our people; and acknowledging the critical and central role that teachers and schools play in the quality of education provided, we commit to placing high priority on ongoing teacher development, from initial preparation to retirement.”*

“A body should be established within the OAS that would serve as an observer of educational processes and that would be responsible for overseeing that the commitments agreed to by our Nations are implemented. There are already civil society organizations that have begun doing this through a systematic assistance plan for educational processes”

*Eliana Bigai, Venezuela
Venezuelan Women Association*

6. Youth – (paragraph 27)

- Priorities for social actors in this area: The need to empower youth was reiterated, especially through programs aimed at promoting and raising awareness of young peoples’ duties and rights and of this group’s commitment to the future of their countries.

- On the Declaration: It is necessary not only to reaffirm the Declaration of Medellin as done in the Draft Declaration, but also to explicitly support the “Youth Bill of Rights”.

“One of the most important State commitments should be “preparation of youth leaders”...in order to assure the prosperity of our countries...the question is how to do this? It is very simple; we can do it with young people who are conscious of their fundamental rights and duties. I believe that the Medellin Declaration also includes the commitments of Governments with youth”

*Richard Mauricio Maquera, Peru
Megainternet*

- Proposed action strategies: The importance of reinforcing inter-sector coordination in order to create training and participation spaces was highlighted, particularly by improving cooperation between academia, the private sector, media, government, international organizations and civil society. The necessity of providing feasible tools and opportunities for youth participation that can motivate them to contribute in various ways and to be more actively involved in decision-making processes was also emphasized. These tools and opportunities should be present not only at the local level, but also at national and regional levels.

Participants emphasized the importance of processes such as the Summits of the Americas to promote youth participation in the establishment of priorities and regional mandates. Also, the idea of providing follow-up to these processes was stressed, for which the establishment of implementation and monitoring mechanisms for the mandates agreed upon would be key.

Finally, the need to provide civil identity to young people was underscored. This would allow youth to fulfill their social and political rights and to have a more active level of democratic participation.

“Without a doubt, taking the Declaration of Medellin as a guideline is important and accurate. However, it is my opinion that the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain should explicitly urge all countries in the Americas to sign the “Youth Bill of Rights”.

*Nestor Iván Lagos, Colombia
Municipal Council for Youth*

7. Knowledge-Based Society – (paragraph 28)

- Priorities for social actors in this area: In this subject, an emphasis was made as to the importance of recognizing that information and communication technologies (ICT) constitute a key tool, both for the establishment and implementation of development and poverty reduction programs.

- On the Declaration: It is necessary to echo in the Declaration the importance of corporate social responsibility initiatives and of public-private partnerships as a way to overcome persistent obstacles to acquiring and updating new technologies.

- Proposed action strategies: The need to join efforts with academia was also underscored, both as a means of the improved implementation of technological training for the population and as a method of increasing the public’s involvement in modernization processes. A proposal to achieve this inter-sector coordination, both at the national and regional levels, is the creation of an Advisory Council, which would be complemented with the strengthening of initiatives that promote the exchange of successful experiences and lessons learned among the countries of the region.

“A mechanism to achieve inter-sector coordination is the creation of an Advisory Council, composed of member States’ Ministries of Education and the Authorities responsible for communication technologies. The Advisory Council would meet periodically to review the agenda related to this problematic”.

*María Elena Murillo, México
Asociación de Profesionistas del Magisterio, A.C*

In addition, significant contributions were made in innovative areas such as the relevance of microtelcos, “small-scale telecommunications operators that combine local entrepreneurial skills, municipal efforts and community action,” (Galperin 2007). These were suggested to be an alternative approach to establish communication networks in regions that have proved to be unattractive to the private sector. Participants highlighted how the Declaration could emphasize the need to create favorable conditions for the expansion of these types of small-scale operators.

The forum also focused on the problematic of digital poverty as well as the prevalence of a wide digital divide in Latin America and the Caribbean. There is a need for political leaders of the region to recognize the importance of ICT and to reflect this recognition by investing the necessary resources to reduce and eliminate the gap.

- Suggestions to the language and text: A change to the language utilized in paragraph 28 was proposed: “*We recognize that the benefits of the Knowledge-based society must reach every citizen of the Americas. We therefore renew our commitments under the Agenda for Connectivity in the Americas, the Plan of Action of Quito and the Tunis Commitment to ensure the advancement of information and communication technologies as a cross-cutting tool to accelerate the achievement of human prosperity, environmental sustainability and good governance. We instruct our Ministers and High Level Authorities with responsibility for Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to promote the use of ICTs in all areas where they can improve the quality of life of our citizens and the functioning of our societies.*”

“To what extent should digital poverty, that is, a major lack of access to information and Communications Technologies, be considered a component of poverty more generally? It is often the case that access to the internet and other ICTs is thought of as frivolous when compared to much more pressing and emotionally powerful issues such as violence, starvation, displacement and other immediate threats to human well-being. Yet, it is a fact that access to ICT can play a massive role in the amelioration of all of the threats to human prosperity that are mentioned in the Declaration”

*Kristjan Sigurdson, Canada
Department of Human Development, OAS*

8. Culture – (paragraph 29)

- Priorities for social actors in this area: Discussions on this issue highlighted the need to find mechanisms to preserve the cultural legacies, languages and traditions of indigenous peoples. In addition, the necessity of designing policies that encourage multicultural interaction and that promote respect towards the native customs of each culture was emphasized.

In the same token, there was a degree of urgency placed on the promotion of research and the creation of dialogue whereby solutions may be found to address the challenges faced by a multicultural region such as Latin America and the Caribbean. Particularly, a mention was made of the advisability of defining strategies to reduce the negative impact of globalization on local cultural identities.

“... When will we wake up to our own realities and confidence in the strengths that our cultural realities offer us? It would be heartening to see policy directions in all aspects of the Summit designed on these cultural strengths rather than force-feed our way into alien concepts and beliefs”.

*Kris Rampersad, Trinidad y Tobago
Network of NGOS of T&T for Advancement of Women*

To access a complete compilation of social actors’ comments and suggestions in the Human Prosperity forum, [please click here](#).

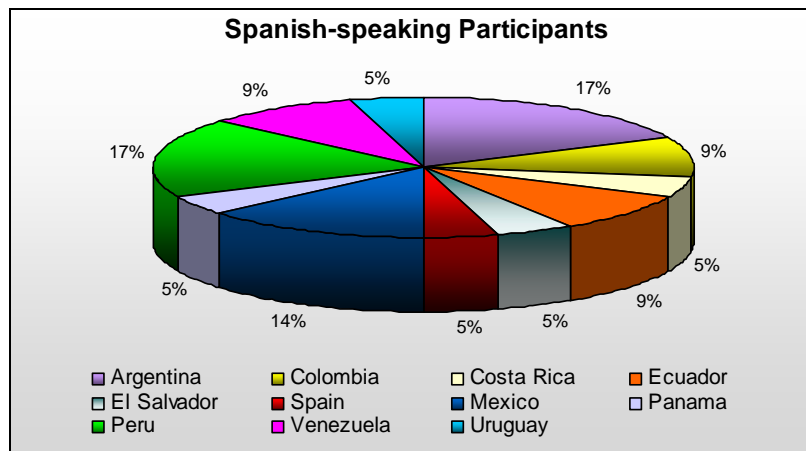
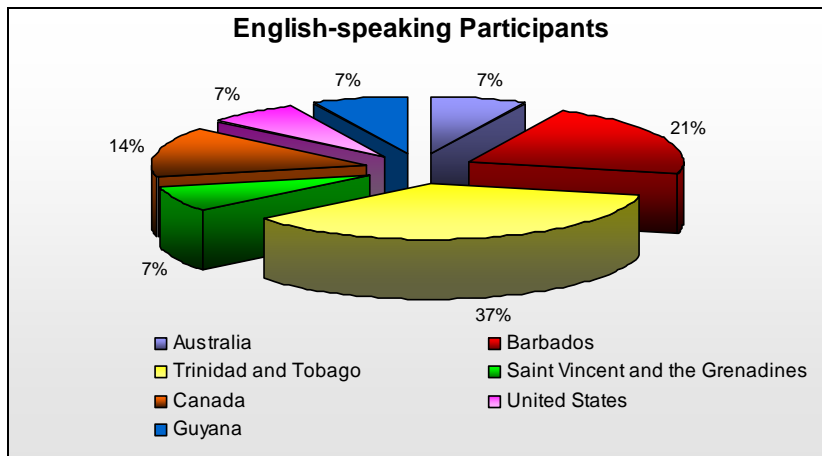
Annexes

A. Forum Participants

The Summits Virtual Platform has a total of 317 users, who have registered since its launch on September 8th. Of this total, 36 had an active participation in this first virtual exchange on Human Prosperity. Two parallel fora were held, one in English and one in Spanish, where 14 and 22 participants intervened respectively from different geographic zones.

In the English-speaking forum, participants were mostly from the Caribbean (Barbados, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago), as well as from Guyana, Australia, Canada and the United States. In the Spanish-speaking forum, participants were mainly from the Andean region (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela), although there was also a moderate representation of Central American countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador and Panama) and Mexico, as well as Southern Cone countries (mainly Argentina and Uruguay).

By and large, contributors to the forum tend to come from civil society organizations, academia and some institutional members of the Joint Summit Working Group (JSWG), such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Organization of American States (OAS).



B. List of Participants

	Country	Name	Institution	Position held	e-mail
1	Argentina	Martha Inés Miravete	Group of Women of Argentina- Observatory	President	denunciasddhh@gmail.com
2	Argentina	Eduardo Alberto Bruchmann	Fundación Innovación e Integración	President-Founder	presidente@fundacioniei.org.ar
3	Argentina	Javier Saenz Coré	Universidad Nacional del Sur. Secretaria de Cultura y Extensión Universitaria	Responsible for Projects	jsaenzcore@gmail.com
4	Argentina	Lic. Pedro D.N. Cortínez	Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad Nacional de San Juan	Sociologist, MA. Environmental Management and Development	pcortinez@arnet.com.ar
5	Australia	Gary Shaw	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development		shaw.gary.r@edumail.vic.gov.au
6	Barbados	Roosevelt King O.	Barbados Association of NGOs	Secretary General	admin@bango.org.bb
7	Barbados	Marcia Brandon Rosemarie	Barbados Youth Business Trust	Executive Director	bybyyouthbusiness@caribsurf.com
8	Barbados	Rodney Grant	Pinelands Creative Workshop	CEO	grantrodney@hotmail.com
9	Canada	Rebecca Tromsness	UBC Okanagan	Teaching Assistant	rebeccajoy_t@hotmail.com
10	Canada	Kristjan Sigurdson	Department of Human Development, OAS		ksigurdson@oas.org
11	Colombia	Alexandra González Rubio	OEA	Intern	ng7161a@student.american.edu
12	Colombia	Nestor Iván Lagos	Municipal Council for Youth	Municipal Youth Advisor	nilagosh@gmail.com
13	Costa Rica	Jeanneth Cooper	Centro de Mujeres Afrocostarricenses	Project Coordinator	jeannethcooperc@hotmail.com
14	Ecuador	Rita Elena Yacelga Andrade	Fundación Dunamis	President	fundunamis@gmail.com
15	Ecuador	Silvina Gernaert Willmar	Fundación ChasquiNet	Project Coordinator	info@chasquinet.org
16	El Salvador	Maritza Melara	Consultant on Human Rights	Consultant	maritzamelara@yahoo.es
17	Spain	Miguel Porrúa	Executive Secretariat of Integral Development, OAS	e-Government Coordinator	mporrua@oas.org
18	United States	Melissa Golladay	Partners of the Americas	Director of Youth Exchanges	mgolladay@partners.net
19	Guyana	Rudolph Callender	Callender Quantity Surveying & Construction Agency	Managing Director	fiji22gy@hotmail.com
20	Mexico	Dr. Francisco Blanco Calderón	Foundation for Development of Veracruz, A.C	Executive Director	fundaver@hotmail.com
21	Mexico	Iris Grisel Arjona Mújica	Representante Legal	National President	amexsaa.gricel01@gmail.com
22	Mexico	María Elena Murillo Uresti	Asociación de Profesionistas del Magisterio, A.C.	President - Founder	memurillo@yahoo.com
23	Panama	Thelma Itzel Aizpurúa de Rocha	SEDISCAP -Technical Secretariat for the Program of Action of the Decade of the Americas for the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities	Technical Assistant	thelmaderochoa@hotmail.com
24	Peru	Richard Mauricio Maquera Cutipa	Megainternet	Manager	librafreejkm@hotmail.com

25	Peru	Alan Segundo Marceliano	Pronamachs	Esp. Cuencas	asmadp@gmail.com
26	Peru	Teodomira Angélica Rojas Naupa	Asociación de Mujeres Indígenas Tawantinsuyo	Vice President	cpcangelica2003@yahoo.es
27	Peru	Luis Viguria	Young Americas Business Trust - OAS	Executive Director	lviguria@oas.org
28	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Rudi Daniel	Independent Consultant	Consultant	rudi.daniel@gmail.com
29	Trinidad and Tobago	Kris Rampersad	Network of NGOs of T&T for Advancement of Women	Director Research, ICTs, Lobby, Media Consultant	kriscivica@yahoo.com
30	Trinidad and Tobago	Karen Bart-Alexander	Gayap Violence Prevention Peace and Love Movement	Leader	karenbartalexander@yahoo.com
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38	OAS	Claudia Salazar	Summits Virtual Platform Coordinator	Summits of the Americas Secretariat	csalazar@oas.org

C. Reference Documents

During the development of the forum, a compilation of over 15 documents related to the human prosperity theme was produced. These documents provide technical, legislative and regulatory background information and links to pertinent websites.

For a complete list and access to reference documents and resources [please click here](#).