



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation regarding
the Bilateral Visit to the Caribbean, the Americas and the
Atlantic Region Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**

**Canadian Branch of the
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)**

Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago

February 19 – 24, 2011

Report

A delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association visited the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago from February 19-24, 2011. The Canadian Branch was represented by the following delegation:

- Mr. Russ Hiebert, MP, Chair of the Canadian Branch, Leader of the delegation
- The Honourable Elizabeth Hubley, Senator
- The Honourable Donald Plett, Senator
- Mr. Merv Tweed, MP
- Mr. Jim Maloway, MP

The delegation was assisted by Philippe Méla, Acting Executive Secretary of the Branch.

The objectives of the visit to Trinidad and Tobago included:

- Increasing collaboration between the branches of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region and the Canadian Branch of the CPA
- Conducting bilateral and multilateral meetings with multiple branches of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region at the Regional Secretariat in Port of Spain
- Working together towards modernization of the CPA as it marks its centennial year
- Examining methods of strengthening democracy throughout the Commonwealth
- Increasing trade relations
- Assessing the role of CARICOM in enhancing trade partnerships in the region
- Exploring strategies of recovery following the economic downturn
- Strategizing on bilateral issues including migration, education, health, energy and financial services
- Sharing best practices pertaining to coalition governments and minority parliaments

A. Meeting with representatives of the Tobago House of Assembly

The delegation met in Trinidad and Tobago on these issues and started with a meeting with representatives of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA).

The Tobago House of Assembly (THA) is the local government body responsible for the island of Tobago within the twin-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. The THA was established in 1980 to rectify some of the disparities in the relationship between the two islands, though a prior body using the same name which existed from 1768–1874. In addition to the normal local government functions, the THA handles many of the

responsibilities of the central government, but lacks the ability to collect taxes or impose local laws or zoning regulations. The THA consists of: One Presiding Officer, twelve elected assemblymen, and four appointed councillors. Three of the councillors are appointed on the advice of the Chief Secretary and one on the advice of the Minority Leader. The Chief Secretary is the leader of the majority party in the assembly. Chief Secretary Orville London, Presiding Officer Honourable Ann Mitchell-Gift, minority Leader Ashworth Jack and 7 other representative of the THA met with the Canadian Delegation.

The discussion focussed on how to improve relations between Canada and Trinidad and Tobago regarding oil and gas exploration, development of the pharmaceutical industries, agro-processing, information technologies and tourism. Mr. London indicated that the Canadian tourism market is worth being explored as Canadians do not hesitate to travel long distances to go on vacation. He, however, pointed out that only around 7,000 Canadians come on vacation to Trinidad and Tobago where 700,000 go to the Dominican Republic and a million to Cuba.

The Canadian delegation indicated that it would probably be easier for Canadians to visit Trinidad and Tobago if there were direct more flights from cities other than Toronto, for example, perhaps flights from Calgary or Edmonton. Many people in Winnipeg are from Guyana and Trinidad but, unfortunately, they cannot enjoy visiting with their relatives regularly because of the time it takes to get to Trinidad and the cost associated with the trip. As a proposed solution, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago should try to enter into agreements with airline or charter companies to render the destination more attractive from an economic stand point to travellers. Also, Trinidad and Tobago should advertise how safe the destination is as more and more travelers are sensitive to this scene. In addition to those looking for a short holiday, the market of “snowbirds” could also be tapped into.

The delegation from the THA also mentioned that when it comes to funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), they felt CIDA should consider Tobago as a region on its own, separate from Trinidad, to obtain more funding as the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as a whole maybe above the level of contribution.

As a result of the discussion, the delegation from THA asked if the Canadian delegation could appoint a contact person to deal with specific issues related to Trinidad and Tobago, someone who could convey messages from the THA to the government of Canada. Mr. Merv Tweed accepted to be the contact person.

B. Meeting with Officials of the High Commission for Canada to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

The delegation met with Her Excellency Karen McDonald, High Commissioner for Canada to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. After reviewing the results of the last general election where the party in power, the People’s National Movement was overturned by a coalition of four parties called the People Partnership after an election campaign based on change, transparency, changes to the laws regarding crime and expansion of child care program, additionally the delegation exchanged with Officials of the High Commission on various other subjects.

Regarding safety, it was indicated that in 2009, Trinidad and Tobago experienced more than 480 murders, mostly related to the drug trade. In fact, the shortest distance between Venezuela and Trinidad is only 10 km and a lot of drugs from Colombia are landing on the shores of Trinidad from Venezuela. It is very difficult to control and intercept the fast, small boats used to smuggle drugs into Trinidad to be then boarded onto bigger boats to be redirected to Europe, the United States and Canada. So far, the high rate of crime has not targeted foreigners living in Trinidad and Tobago or tourists, aside from one incident of a British National who was the victim of a home invasion and severely beaten by her assailants. The government of Trinidad and Tobago has made the war on drugs one of its priorities, and has hired a new Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police, both of them, former RCMP Officers from Canada.

In 2003, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago created the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT), to support all security forces in their task of fighting crime. Since then, allegations that members of the SAUTT and members of the Special Intelligence Agency have engaged in illegal activities have come forward and the new government has decided to dismantle the SAUTT and replace by the Strategic Service Agency.

The economy of Trinidad and Tobago, a small oil and gas producer, has suffered from the financial crisis driving the price of oil and gas down. Trinidad and Tobago is also not part of Petrocaribe, a Caribbean oil alliance with Venezuela to purchase oil on conditions of preferential payment. The alliance was launched in June 2005. The payment system allows for a few nations to buy oil at market value, but only a certain amount is needed up front; the remainder can be paid through a 25 year financing agreement on 1% interest. The deal allows for the Caribbean nations to purchase up to 185,000 barrels of oil per day on these terms. Trinidad and Tobago being the southernmost islands of the Caribbean, tourism tends to be limited which has a cumulative effect on the economy. The economy is expected to grow by 3 to 3.5% over the next 5 years on the expansion of infrastructure project aimed at increasing tourism activities. Trinidad and Tobago is looking at expanding its use of renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power.

The High Commissioner indicated that the Canadian mission is 60 officials strong, about 30 of whom are dedicated to immigration matters. Trinidad and Tobago has very good relations with Canada and is a welcoming and stable place for business from Canadian entrepreneurs and investors alike. As an example of this, Canada is the second biggest investor in Trinidad and Tobago. Some restrictions do exist for Canadians who might wish to relocate to Trinidad and Tobago.

C. Courtesy call on His Excellency George Maxwell Richards, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

The President immediately underlined the close relationships that have existed between Trinidad and Tobago and Canada since the early stage of Canadian Confederation. He indicated that this mission was opportune as a Ministerial visit from Canada is in preparation. These visits are very good opportunities to examine where trade avenues could be developed as oil reserves of Trinidad and Tobago are only estimated to be in the realm of 10 to 12 years in duration. The President also indicated that Canada and Trinidad and Tobago have excellent relations when it comes to education as many

students benefit from agreements in place to study in Canada. When it comes to education, the government of Trinidad and Tobago offers free tuition to post secondary students and a system of student loans is in place to cover housing costs.

The President, who is also the Army Chief of Staff, indicated that he would welcome any help from Canada, particularly in Coast Guard activities, to attempt to discourage drug cartels to use Trinidad and Tobago as a platform for shipping drugs around the world due to the proximity to Venezuela where the drugs are coming from.

The Canadian delegation exchanged views with the President on existing trade opportunities, on the development of infrastructures to develop tourism and on the fact that education is the cornerstone of development of a country. It was agreed that education leads to opportunities. Security in Trinidad remains an issue which needs to be addressed. Tourism must also be developed. The delegation expressed its appreciation that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had ratified The Ottawa Treaty, otherwise known as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction and that no troops were sent to Afghanistan.

D. Courtesy call on the Joint Presidents of the Trinidad and Tobago Branch of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

The Canadian delegation met with the Honourable Timothy Hamel-Smith, Senator, President of the Senate together with The Honourable Wade Mark, MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives. The President and Speaker are the joint Presidents of the Trinidad and Tobago Branch of CPA. The Presidents explained that since the last general election of 2010, there are 41 Members of Parliament directly elected by the population and 31 Senators, 16 appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister, nine are appointed by the President and six appointed by the President on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition. At the present time, the Parliament Building is being renovated and advice has been sought from the Canadian Parliament on how to proceed in a cost effective manner. Also, at the present time, the House of Representatives and the Senate are sharing the same Chamber but want to have separate Chambers at the end of the renovation process. The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is trying to achieve full autonomy from the Executive Branch (i.e. with a separate budget) and will try to put in place a new management structure, complete the renovation to the Parliament Building and amend its Standing Orders before the end of the present term in 2015. The Legislature could change the constitution to have elections at fixed dates, not more than two terms for the President, have a recall mechanism for MPs much like the one existing in some parts of Canada, and more referenda to consult the population on key issues. Also, Trinidad wants to improve its relations with Tobago to avoid the question of full autonomy put forward at times by Tobago.

The Canadian delegation explained that there are similarities between Canada and Trinidad and Tobago with the province of Quebec seeking independence, with the renovation of the Parliament Buildings and with the reform of the institutions. On the reform of the Senate in Canada, the delegation elaborated on the fact that several opinions exist in Canada, from having an elected Senate to eliminating the Senate altogether. It was noted that the Senate still represents the Provinces and ensures that

aboriginal people have a voice in the Senate. Also emphasized was the fact that Senators are not all politicians, some being recognized experts in their fields.

The delegation also exchanged views with the two Presidents on the conditions of prorogation, length of terms for Senators and Members of Parliament and on the number of terms desirable for the leader of a country.

Speaker Mark went on to describe that during the latest elections in Trinidad and Tobago and for the first time in a modern democracy, rather than several political parties competing to obtain a majority of seats, the party in power was opposed by a coalition of five different parties, each with a unique platform and a single leader. The coalition ended up winning the elections and the Leader became the Prime Minister. He thought that if the coalition were to remain in power until the end of its term in 2015, it would be a good test case for political scientists to look at. He concluded the meeting by adding that Trinidad and Tobago will host the 2012 Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers.

E. Meeting with Canadian business people in Trinidad and Tobago

The delegation met with four individuals doing business in Trinidad and Tobago and exchanged views on the business conditions and on the various markets in Trinidad and Tobago.

It was explained that the global financial crisis and the arrival of a new government in Trinidad and Tobago had a cumulative effect on the situation of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago which has become a very difficult environment for investors. Nevertheless, Canadians are well regarded business partners due to excellent know how and business ethics. However, some specific reasons seem to hinder the capacity to develop business opportunities in Trinidad and Tobago. The arrival of a new government which has decided to look at the way government contracts were attributed under the previous government has had the effect of stopping all projects. The difficulty to find heavy machinery and equipment and skilled operators create difficulties in some industries. The length of time it takes to sign contracts with the government or to obtain working permit for expatriate workers also makes for difficult business conditions.

F. Meeting with the Minister of National Security of Trinidad and Tobago

The delegation met with the Minister of National Security, the Honourable Martin Joseph, Senator and exchanged views on a number of topics. Minister Martin indicated that the political and economical situations are stable and that Trinidad and Tobago should be viewed as an excellent place for foreign investors to do business. He explained that expatriates do not require a work permit if they intend to work in Trinidad and Tobago for less than 30 days and that working permits for longer periods can be issued if the situation warrants it.

He indicated that the government has put on the market eleven drilling blocks for oil exploration and that three have been purchased although no Canadian company took part in the bidding process. He also indicated that it is government policy to honour contracts signed by the government even if the signatories are foreign investors or companies.

G. Meeting with the Minister of Tourism and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago

The delegation met with Mr. Stephen Cadiz, Minister of Tourism and Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan, Minister of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Cadiz indicated that since becoming a Republic in 1976, and long before, Canada and Trinidad and Tobago always enjoyed excellent relations. There are about 100,000 people from Trinidad and Tobago living in Canada, mainly in Toronto. The Parliament of Canada is a source of inspiration in the conduct of its debates where everyone gets a chance to express their views. The Ministry commended the application of the Standing Orders. He also indicated that since the new government has started its work, the debates have been closely followed by the population and roughly 20% of the population watches the debates on television.

Regarding Tourism, the Minister explained that Trinidad and Tobago is first trying to attract eco-tourists looking for all inclusive services with mid range accommodations and then will develop the services from this point on. The Carnival also attracts a lot of tourists.

The Canadian delegation elaborated on tourism by indicating that Canadians do not hesitate to travel far distances to go on vacation and they go mainly to Spanish-speaking countries like Mexico, Cuba or the Dominican Republic when they could go to an English-speaking country like Trinidad and Tobago. It seems they do not know enough about the country to take the leap and book their vacations there.

The Canadian delegation indicated to the Minister that Mr. Mervin Tweed will be the contact person between Trinidad and Tobago and Canada if issues need to be brought forward to the attention of the Canadian Government. The Canadian delegation mentioned that the value of exports from Canada to Trinidad and Tobago is about \$500M and that both countries should work at increasing the trade relations as long as there are assurances that contracts will be respected and suppliers paid. All eyes are now turning toward the negotiation of the free trade agreement between the Caribbean Community (Caricom) and Canada.

Dr. Rambachan started by indicating that Trinidad and Tobago has a good reputation as a business partner and it pays its suppliers and honours its contracts but also pointed out that these requirements also apply to suppliers doing business with the government. He indicated that he had hopes that the free trade agreement could be signed by the end of 2011. He mentioned that major infrastructure projects are presently being studied such as two hospitals and roads and Canadian companies could be interested in taking part in these projects. However, he underlined that Export Development Canada (EDC) should be more flexible with its criteria to fund projects as is the case with China. He mentioned that Trinidad and Tobago is the number one producer of methanol in the world and pointed out that Trinidad and Tobago has a great international experience in dealing with big companies such as BP or BHP. On the Canadian side, he indicated that Trinidad and Tobago is going to have four honorary Consuls in Canada and wants to open a trade office in Vancouver.

H. Meeting with the Leader of the Opposition

The delegation met with The Honourable Dr. Keith Rowley, MP, Leader of the Opposition and exchanged views on tourism, trade and the Commonwealth

Parliamentary Association. Dr. Rowley indicated that almost a third of the total population is involved in the Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago and it is too bad that so few tourists come for it.

Regarding trade, Dr. Rowley is former Minister of Trade and was involved in the negotiation of the Trinidad and Tobago – European Union free trade agreement. One of the problems encountered during the negotiation was the opening of procurement contracts at the Caricom level in order to have the market totally open. The subsidiary of a global company could use the resources of the parent company which would make it very difficult to compete against for local companies. He mentioned that Canada is well regarded as a negotiating partner because it respects its partners and does not drive negotiations too hard. He pointed out that Canada has an interest in the development of Trinidad and Tobago given the number of immigrants applying to come to Canada.

Regarding tourism, Dr. Rowley indicated that he feels that Trinidad and Tobago does not have enough flights from international destinations and better and more effective marketing campaigns are needed in order to attract tourism, particularly during the time of the Carnival.

Dr. Rowley elaborated on the security issue which appears to be a serious problem due to drug trafficking in the region. He indicated that he would have preferred to see a local commissioner of police appointed alongside his deputy who is from Canada rather than two Canadians. Local knowledge of the street is important to train police forces. He felt that if security was not resolved, people who are leaders in the society may feel threatened and leave Trinidad and Tobago which would result in impoverishment of the Caribbean. He recommended that there should be more contacts at the parliamentary level between Trinidad and Tobago and Canada and the United States of America.

When asked by the delegation if a member of the opposition of Trinidad and Tobago will participate at the CPA conference in July 2011, Dr. Rowley indicated that he was planning on attending.

I. Courtesy call on the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

The delegation met with Right Honourable Ms Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the seventh person to hold this position and the first female Prime Minister, who was elected in May 2010. The Prime Minister indicated that she had met the Prime Minister of Canada at the United Nations and he appeared to be clear and focused on his objectives for Canada. She mentioned that one of the biggest hotels in Tobago had been shut down and was looking for investors, possibly Canadians and she gave all assurance that in Trinidad and Tobago contracts are honoured and suppliers are paid as they should which was to the satisfaction of the Canadian delegation.

The Head of the Canadian delegation commented on the differences in bringing forward an opposition coalition during the mandate of a government and presenting a coalition to the electorate as a choice of possible government. The Prime Minister agreed and indicated that in order to become the new Prime Minister, there was no other alternative than creating a coalition of five political parties before the past elections as a choice to the electorate. The Head of the Canadian delegation pointed out that Trinidad and Tobago was the second largest trade investor in the Caribbean after Cuba and that

relations between the two countries should be increased. The Head of the delegation noted that Mr. Merv Tweed was the parliamentary point of contact for Trinidad and Tobago on tourism-related issues.

The delegation indicated that they were looking forward to bring opportunities to Canadian entrepreneurs in a stable and secure business environment but noted that the links by air between Canada and Trinidad and Tobago needed to be improved.

J. Meeting with the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association

The delegation met with Mr. Greig Laughlin, President and Dr. Trevor Townsend, Director of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA). The Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association was founded in 1956 and is comprised today of about 400 members. The TTMA promotes, encourages and assists the growth and development of manufacturing industries in Trinidad and Tobago. The TTMA also acts as a representative for industries in dealing with government and in the monitoring of legislation affecting manufacturers. The TTMA is also responsible for the generation of market expansion both regionally and internationally through the mounting of local, regional and international trade fairs, exhibitions and foreign trade missions.

The TTMA promotes the use of modern methods of manufacturing and education for all of its members. The TTMA also focuses on assisting local manufacturers in the maintenance of required standards of safety, labor relations, wages and benefits, communications, public relations and advertising. Moreover, the TTMA provides assistance in the field of securing markets for both raw materials and finished products as well as in the sourcing of investment partners for members.

As TTMA is very involved in the negotiation of a free trade agreement between Canada and Trinidad and Tobago, the two representatives explained that it took eight years to negotiate a free trade agreement with the EU because of the way the negotiations are conducted by Cariforum on behalf of Caricom and the consensus based process. Canada is the fourth largest trading partner of Trinidad and Tobago (oil and gas, pasta, juice, textile). In the negotiation for a free trade agreement with Canada, Canada wants to impose environmental standards which do not pose a problem to Trinidad and Tobago but could pose a problem to other members of Caricom. Presently, certain goods are exported to Canada duty free according to a waiver agreed to at the World Trade Organization (WTO). At the end of 2011, this waiver will expire and these goods will have duties imposed on them by Canada which is troublesome for Trinidad and Tobago because these goods will lose their competitive edge. Canada could go to the WTO and ask to extend the waiver for a longer period but in doing so may have to agree to extend the waiver with other countries, which Canada does not seem to be ready to do at the present time.

The delegation explained that Canada finds it difficult to negotiate trade agreements with groups of countries and preference is given (aside from the Canada-EU enhanced economic agreement being negotiated) to bilateral trade negotiations.

The representative of TTMA explained that since the new government is in place they find it difficult for bills to be settled and the government can take up to six months to pay. The delay having to be factored in the cost of production of goods or services tends to increase the final cost. Another problem Trinidad and Tobago is facing is the

collection of taxes. Very few businesses are computerized so it is difficult for the government to know how much tax is owed to the government.

K. Meeting with the representative of the British Virgin Islands, Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago

The delegation met with Dr. Orlando Smith, MP, Leader of the Opposition of the British Virgin Islands (BVI), the Honourable George James Mc Guire, MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Grenada and The Honourable Wade Mark, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The participants indicated that multilateral meetings are very useful as they allow exchanging best practices but how can these best practices be transferred for a CPA context to the respective participating governments. Dr. Smith indicated that, in BVI, the legislator can authorize the disbursement of money for specific need (i.e.: if a citizen needs money to cover a hospital bill.) In his experience, he explained that in the Seychelles, people tend to ask their own MP directly and often they end up footing the bill out of their own pockets.

The participants talked about the Canadian submission to CPA regarding the regional rotation of Executive positions at the Secretariat General. It appears that the CPA is often presided over by the same countries and it appears that there is a growing sense that more and more countries feel excluded. The Canadian proposal of a rotation system would allow for the key positions to be rotated through the regions.

Mr. Mark indicated that there are tremendous trade opportunities which exist between Canada and Trinidad and Tobago due to the historic connections between the two countries for more than 100 years. He was doubtful that the free trade agreement between Canada and Trinidad and Tobago would be concluded by the end of 2011 because all members of Caricom may not be able to come to an agreement themselves.

Mr. McGuire agreed with Mr. Mark and explained that it is difficult for negotiators of the free trade to travel due to the limited resources they have at their disposal. Mr. Smith indicated that the use of video conferences could alleviate the need of meeting in person and reduce the cost for all participants and should be explored. Mr. McGuire indicated that some assistance may be needed to access the Canadian market for some new promising new products such as nutmeg (the use of the nutmeg as an ingredient in natural pain killers).

Mr. Mark explained that the worldwide financial crisis has hit Trinidad and Tobago very hard but that the country has at its disposal a heritage fund of TT\$3 billion or roughly Can\$500M and it may have to start using these funds as a stimulus for the local economy. One of the problems is that local products are exported and internally consumed products are imported which tends to raise the cost of living. He also pointed out that the drug trade in the region is a serious threat, not only for the safety of the people but also for democracy as the drug money could be used to bribe public officials, the judiciary or politicians who would amplify the problem and therefore, the promotion of democracy is an absolute necessity.

The Canadian delegation explained that Canada had recently ratified a free trade agreement with Colombia to improve trade but also improve democracy. It was also

suggested that the Government of Grenada approach American airline companies and offer them subsidies as an incentive to bring tourism to the country. Mr. McGuire explained that Grenada is less inclined to do that after the government helped foreign entrepreneurs to start with the construction of hotels and they left the country after receiving the subsidies leaving the project uncompleted but wondered if the \$600 million development program that Canada has in the region could not be used for more commercially oriented projects.

Mr. McGuire emphasized the fact that citizens of Grenada need a visa to enter Canada due to fraud that occurred six years ago where false passports were sold to give access to Canada. He gave the Canadian delegation all assurances that the fraud has now stopped and all passports that were in circulation at the time of the fraud were discovered and are now all expired. In the past, 200 people from Grenada would go to Canada as temporary labourers but due to the visa restriction, the number has now fallen to ten which causes an economic problem for the island. He expressed his wish that Grenada go back to initial levels after the visa requirement is lifted. Mr. McGuire explained that regarding energy, Grenada cannot be dependent on OPEC countries and is looking at alternative sources of energy, solar, wind and geothermal with an ambitious geothermal project where Mount St. Catherine, a volcano, would possibly generate 30 to 60 megawatts of electricity.

L. Meeting with the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education of Trinidad and Tobago

The delegation met with the Honourable Fazal Karim, MP, Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. He indicated that he has been a teacher at all levels for all of his life, has travelled extensively, studied abroad and is now trying to provide the best tools available for the education of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. He indicated that there are very close relationships between Canada and Trinidad and Tobago with a number of students going to study on scholarships provided by CIDA. He suggested that exchange programs should be envisioned with universities in the maritime provinces. The Delegation indicated that Canada issues on average 800 student visas per year, that the University of Western Indies has a cooperative arrangement with about 20 Canadian universities.

Mr. Karim spoke about a program named the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network (CKLN), a multilateral project, supported by the OAS, the World Bank, the European Union and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). It was launched by the Caribbean Community (Caricom) and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) in 2004. The project is designed to enhance the competitiveness of Caribbean countries, using information and communication technologies to connect the Caribbean to the global pool of knowledge, developing human resources and facilitating greater regional integration. He also explained the concept of Open Scholarship for the best and brightest students of Trinidad and Tobago who can choose to study anywhere in the world (upon acceptance in the chosen university) and the government will pay the full amount of tuition and will also provide funding by way of student loans for other expenses.

He spoke about two projects that have been put in place to bring more information to the population regarding education. They take the form of buses circulating the streets

of the country. One bringing knowledge regarding the advancement of technology and the other providing information on the education programs available to the population. The latter was inspired by a similar initiative that the Minister encountered in Canada.

The Head of the delegation explained that more and more Canadian universities have no choice but to link their knowledge in the research field with the realities of the various markets, giving the University of British Columbia as an example. The delegation indicated that Canada is working with the University of Trinidad and Tobago and College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) to help develop such links.

He also suggested that there could be an increase of scholarships awarded by Commonwealth countries and as such, Canada has increased its scholarships from 15 in 2008 to over 50 in 2010. He also mentioned that faculty research fellowships exist.

The delegation also pointed out a specific project that was developed by the University of Manitoba called Smartpark Development Corporation. It is a subsidiary corporation of the University of Manitoba. As a separate legal entity from the University, with its own Board of Directors, the Corporation has the mandate to develop a designated 100 acres of university land as Smartpark Research and Technology Park. Smartpark's vision is to "Build a Community of Innovators" on the doorstep of the University of Manitoba. It does this by developing land and space for lease to research and technology companies and organizations involved in research areas that coincide with research expertise at the University.

Canada is also taking a good look at the future in terms of energy in other countries such as China, Saudi Arabia and the State of Arizona to name a few. The delegation indicated that solar energy should be considered in Trinidad and Tobago even though the initial investment may have to be larger than other renewable sources of energy.

The delegation indicated that education could also be part of the negotiation on the free trade agreement between Canada and Trinidad and Tobago.

When the Minister expressed the idea of creating a national trade program to allow people who are not university educated to obtain a diploma in a specific trade, the delegation explained that Canada has the Red Seal program which allows qualified trades people to practice their trade in any province or territory without having to write additional examinations, thus improving labor mobility in Canada and saving time and resources by eliminating the need for multiple examinations. Labour mobility means that workers qualified for work in a particular occupation in one jurisdiction have access to similar employment opportunities in any other Canadian jurisdiction. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and its partners work to reconcile national occupational standards to allow workers access to jobs across Canada.

In conclusion, the members of the delegation wish to extend their sincere thanks to the Hon. Timothy Hamel-Smith, Senator, President of the Senate; Hon. Wade Mark, MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives.; the parliamentarians and staff of the parliaments of Trinidad and Tobago for their active participation in the development and implementation of the program and their generous hospitality throughout the visit. A strong vote of thanks must also be sent to Ambassador Karen McDonald, Canadian

High Commissioner to Trinidad and Tobago and her staff for their invaluable assistance throughout this bilateral visit.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Russ Hiebert, M.P., Chair,
Canadian Branch of the
Commonwealth Parliamentary
Association (CPA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
ACTIVITY	Bilateral Visit to Trinidad & Tobago
DESTINATION	Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago
DATES	February 19 – 24, 2011
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Senator Elizabeth Hubley Senator Donald Plett
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Russ Hiebert, M.P., Chair Mr. Jim Maloway, M.P. Mr. Merv Tweed, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. Philippe Méla, Acting Executive Secretary
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 7,543.34
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 8,707.28
HOSPITALITY	\$ 125.40
PER DIEMS	\$ 1,125.90
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 1,088.80
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 27.00
TOTAL	\$ 18,617.72

