



**Remarks by Ambassador Niermala Badrising,  
Chair of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development and Permanent Representative of  
Suriname to the Organization of American States, on the occasion of the Capstone Luncheon of the  
Third Americas Competitiveness Exchange on Innovation and Entrepreneurship,  
April 24, 2015, Chicago, Illinois,**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be part of this Capstone Luncheon of the Third Americas Competitiveness Exchange on Innovation and Entrepreneurship. I join you in my capacity as Chair of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI) of the Organization of American States (OAS).

Let me first recognize and congratulate our distinguished hosts, Lieutenant Governor of the State of Illinois, Evelyn Sanguinetti; U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce-International Trade Administration, Antwaun Griffin; Dr. Robert Easter, President of the University of Illinois; Dr. Michael Amiridis, Chancellor of the University of Illinois at Chicago; Dr. Lawrence Schook, Vicepresident for Research; Dr. Reitumetse Mabokela, Vice Provost for International Affairs and Global Strategies.

Lieutenant Governor Sanguinetti, Dr. Easter and Dr. Amiridis, our appreciation to you and to your fellow leaders in the states and universities of Minnesota and Wisconsin for welcoming us and giving our participants the opportunity to engage with public and private sector leaders, faculty and other stakeholders at key innovation hubs in your communities.

The Executive Secretary for Integral Development of the OAS, Sherry Tross, who couldn't be here asked me to convey two special messages to you. First, she wanted me to express her profound appreciation to all the ACE organizers, hosts and participants for making this program

a success. She also wanted to specially thank the University of Illinois for its invaluable partnership with the OAS and invite you and others to continue to work with the OAS to advance development and opportunity for the people of the Americas.

As a development expert myself, I understand the value of these kinds of programs. More importantly, I believe that when we create spaces for constructive engagement, everybody benefits. Today, senior officials from Latin America and the Caribbean have become familiar with 42 sites in 9 cities in states.

Participants have experienced the fine hospitality of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois, and have seen first hand both the challenges encountered and the lessons learned that helped you arrive where you are today. I am sure that many of these lessons will be adapted to the particular circumstances of different countries as they work toward achieving their own development goals. And I am sure that new friendships and partnerships will have been created. This is an essential part of the value of these programs.

Being here in Chicago, let me use this opportunity to express our appreciation for the strategic relationship that the OAS has had for the past four years with the team of the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA) of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This partnership has helped to inform, enrich and support more than ten high-level OAS meetings of Ministers from across the Americas in the areas of Science and Technology, Education, Competitiveness and Culture. Through the OAS, the NCSA has also supported exchanges and collaboration with researchers, governments and other stakeholders by hosting workshops, videoconferences, campus visits, contributing to publications and donating one million supercomputing hours. Thank you and we look forward to an ongoing collaboration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Advancing competitiveness and innovation is an integral component of the efforts of OAS member states to promote sustainable and inclusive development. We do this in a number of ways – through policy dialogue, technical assistance and partnerships.

The Americas Competitiveness Exchange on Innovation and Entrepreneurship is a concrete initiative that reflects collaboration among regional partners under the umbrella of the Americas Competitiveness Forum (ACF) and the Inter-American Competitiveness Network (RIAC). It is an opportunity to share ideas, to build relationships and to spur economic growth.

Indeed, the launch of the First Americas Competitiveness Forum (ACF) in 2007 in Atlanta, Georgia by the U.S. Department of Commerce and the creation of the Inter-American Competitiveness Network (RIAC) at the OAS in 2009 created an unprecedented momentum that has led to these highly successful competitiveness exchange programs.

These regional initiatives have taken shape and grown to become very important policy-making spaces in competitiveness and innovation within the Americas. To give you a sense of the reach of these initiatives -- Guatemala, Trinidad and Tobago, Panama, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Chile, the United States – have all served as hosts of the Competitiveness Forum and there is always a steady supply of member state offers to support this important mechanism for dialogue and cooperation.

The Competitiveness Network originally started with 16 countries and now includes Competitiveness Authorities, Public and Private Competitiveness and Innovation Councils from all OAS Member States as well as universities and think-tanks from the Americas and Europe. International financial institutions have now also become partners in this growing enterprise.

One of the major outcomes of the Competitiveness Network was the establishment in 2011 of a conceptual framework of ten general competitiveness principles. Countries now routinely evaluate their own competitiveness using these principles as an indicator. The Competitiveness Network also continues to promote the sharing of experiences and the deepening of cooperation opportunities to achieve concrete results.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now, let us pause for a moment to remind ourselves that although poverty has declined over the last decade in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is still very prevalent. Of particular concern is

the situation of youth where, according to the 2014 United Nations Human Development Report, about 39% of the region's 106 million youth, many of them minors, live in poverty.

We have also made progress in reducing inequality over the past decade, but, despite this, our region remains the most unequal region in the world. When we discuss inequality, we tend to center our attention on inequality defined by "incomes" or the distribution of wealth across societies and the region. We should, however, broaden the concept and focus our attention on "**equality of opportunity**," and the resultant capacity to change lives. This is where I would argue that innovation, entrepreneurship and technology can have significant impact -- perhaps not immediately but as part of a long term strategy.

Without equality of opportunity, we cannot adequately endow individuals and communities with the skills, education, resources and professional network connections, needed to aspire towards quality jobs and long-term progress. In our inter-connected global village, successful businesses and inclusive societies stem from productive and skilled labor pools that build on technology and quality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Innovation and Technology can be powerful tools to promote social inclusion, when combined with quality education and a vibrant entrepreneurship ecosystem!**

We need to remind ourselves that **technology** is changing the way we live everyday, and at an unprecedented pace. Technology is embedded in everything we do; in each product and service we use and in our social and personal interactions! The way we learn, read, entertain and conduct our lives, has been transformed.

Clearly, technology is not the sole answer to development challenges. It is nevertheless, an important component in support of attaining sustainable development, propelling **innovation**, and adapting to a constantly changing global reality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to build on the experiences of emerging markets and developed countries, we must promote access to strong and diverse **networks** to promote innovation and leverage technology. Substantive networks are key for saving time, achieving broad-based solutions and providing cross-sectoral specialization at the highest possible quality level.

In order to make this leap into the future with the inclusion of innovation, entrepreneurship and technology, as critical elements for promoting social inclusion, our current approach to developing talent and networks needs to change drastically. Success in developing any workforce with the skill sets necessary for today's reality, will require the commitment of both the public and private sector to invest adequately and effectively in technology and innovation.

The "bottom-up approach" supported by the US Economic Development Administration (EDA) builds on regional strengths, local capacities and networks. Competitiveness efforts at the state and city level are critical for success. **Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce of the EDA, Tom Guevara**, thanks again for the work of your team to make this Exchange a reality.

To the 47 public and private **leaders shaping regional economic development and directing innovation centers in 27 countries of the Americas who are part of this Exchange**, my recognition to you and your countries for your commitment, and for answering our call to join us in this program.

I believe that this is an excellent opportunity to promote high-value regional development, which builds on mutually beneficial cooperation. Your participation and the laudable efforts of our hosts, should allow us to build significant momentum towards achieving the fundamental goals of this Exchange.

Making these initiatives work requires the dedicated commitment of many. I would like to recognize Mr. Antwan Griffin for the great collaboration with the Department of Commerce and with your team at the International Trade Administration, not only for putting together the Exchange, but also for the ongoing support in the context of the Competitiveness Network and Competitiveness Forum over the past few years.

We appreciate the support and collaboration of the **United States Department of State, in particular of the U.S. Mission to the OAS** and the U.S. Embassies in countries in the Americas for their work toward this event.

I wish to also acknowledge the generous support of Canada to the OAS Technical Secretariat.

In closing, let me reiterate that we at the OAS are honored to be part of this effort.

The second message that Secretary Tross asked me to share with you, is the strong commitment of the OAS to continue to support you and your countries in the implementation of the partnerships and collaboration opportunities that will result from this Third (III) Americas Competitiveness Exchange.

As a career diplomat representing Suriname, I know that there is value in this form of diplomacy -- the diplomacy of promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, looking for win-win solutions through knowledge exchange and creative forms of horizontal cooperation, where all countries have something to offer.

At the OAS we underscore the importance of partnerships for advancing development goals as part of our Strategic Vision. I am convinced that this Exchange will produce significant and tangible results that advance our mutual goal of producing concrete results and value for OAS Members States.

I wish you a successful completion of the Exchange and to the new opportunities that may emerge.

Thank you very much.