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# Successful CONCACAF summit brings renewed commitment to cooperation

## *Webb says event start of a new era for region's football*

**George Town, Grand Cayman, October 22** - Leaders from the worlds of football, business and government came together at the first CONCACAF Sports Summit on Tuesday, pledging to forge new partnerships to further develop the game across North and Central America and the Caribbean.

CONCACAF President Jeffrey Webb hailed the event, which brought local stakeholders together with speakers and guests from Europe, Africa and the Middle East, as a "huge success" but said it had to be the start of a new phase for the Confederation, its 41 member federations and the game in the region.

"We heard about great opportunities, about creating legacies. The common theme is that this is our time, it is a new era, a new beginning," said Webb, who took the helm of CONCACAF in 2012 and launched a deep and wide-ranging reform process.

Jamaican Prime Minister, the Most Honorable Portia Simpson-Miller delivered a passionate speech and offered a stark reminder that in some communities, children faced a choice between the "ball and the gun". She urged a renewed effort to bring success to the region's teams.

"CONCACAF must dream to win" said Simpson-Miller, "Government and the private sector must collaborate with CONCACAF for us to succeed" she added.

Exemplifying the collaborative spirit of the summit, Simpson-Miller then joined a fascinating panel discussion with the General Secretary of England's Premier League Nic Coward, the Commissioner of Major League Soccer Don Garber and television analyst, former Trinidad and Tobago goalkeeper Shaka Hislop.

One of the issues raised by President Webb was the need for the Caribbean to develop a professional set-up to help raise the level of competitiveness amongst the mostly island nations.

"The Caribbean faces particular challenges when it comes to developing the game at a professional

level. One of the main goals for the Caribbean has to be to develop a sustainable football league. It is time we make this happen," he told the summit.

Kieran Foley Digicel Group Marketing Operations Director, whose company sponsor 17 national federations and national teams in CONCACAF, said the moment was ripe for such a venture.

"Sponsors and partners are looking for vehicles to talk to people. If you can do that, work with brands from the off-set, then you are not that far away from it. You have all government ministers here, leaders of state, football associations – now is the time," he said.

"We are in a fantastic opportunity, we need to understand it and take advantage of it," added Foley.

FIFA President Sepp Blatter had spoken early in the day about 'The Power of Football' and backed the call for engagement between governments and the game.

"When football is working as education, as a school of life, political authorities must help football," he added, noting that national teams are "the best ambassadors" for a country.

The business of the game came into focus during a session with CONCACAF General Secretary Enrique Sanz, FIFA General Secretary Jerome Valcke and Digicel's Foley.

Valcke highlighted the increased revenue the World Cup is generating from television rights while Sanz pointed out that CONCACAF's Gold Cup in 2013 had enjoyed record-breaking successes.

Sanz said that CONCACAF's strategy of investing money back into development and tournaments at all levels was the best way to ensure that their premier competitions continued to grow.

Webb concluded the summit by saying it was time to take the lessons from the intensive day of discussions and put them into action.

"This can simply be the end of a summit or we can make a start to new dialogue and new collaborations which will bring about a vision of transformation through partnership. There is no choice."

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