

AN ADDRESS BY

**THE RIGHT HONOURABLE OWEN S. ARTHUR,
PRIME MINISTER OF BARBADOS**

ON THE OCCASION OF

*THE SIGNING OF THE DECLARATION
LAUNCHING THE
CARICOM SINGLE MARKET AND ECONOMY*

KINGSTON, JAMAICA

MONDAY JANUARY 30, 2006

It is common knowledge that I am perfectly happy to come to Jamaica merely to engage in light pursuits. You will therefore appreciate how special it feels to be here to be part of an occasion which holds the promise of making such a significant difference to the future of our region and the lives of its people.

I have today, on behalf of the Government and people of Barbados signed the declaration marking the coming in to being of the CARICOM Single Market, very conscious of the extraordinary legacy of which I am proud to be a part. A Barbadian National Hero was the only Prime Minister of the West Indies Federation.

Another of our National Heroes, and a Prime Minister of Barbados, was at the founding of both CARIFTA and CARICOM, and was in every respect and moreso than any other Caribbean citizen the architect of economic integration as we have come to know it in the Caribbean.

I regard it as being among my most important contributions as Prime Minister of Barbados to have led our nation to end centuries of colonial history and dependence by ending our relationship with the British Privy Council, and accepting the jurisdiction of the Caribbean Court of Justice in all of its aspects.

It is in this spirit that this evening I solemnly pledge Barbados' complete support to making the Caribbean Single Market and Economy successful.

I do so, conscious of the extraordinary obligation that rests upon us to make Caribbean unity an effective instrument by which to achieve Caribbean progress.

If we were to succeed, as we must, in making the 15 nations of CARICOM one Single Market and Economy, the stark reality is that such a regional economy would still be the smallest and most vulnerable economic bloc in a globalised world.

Ours is therefore the region in today's world where integration is most sorely needed as the indispensable foundation on which to rest national and regional endeavours in pursuit of equitable and sustainable development.

We have tried all the others – various relationships and configurations with metropolitan powers, self-determination and national independence.

It is time to now give Caribbean unity a chance.

I have signed this Declaration this evening as the Prime Minister with the lead responsibilities for the creation of the CSME driven by no sentimentality, but by the pragmatic expectations of what we can now achieve for our people.

The rights that Caribbean nationals will now, for the first time, enjoy to establish enterprise wherever they wish in their region and will release entrepreneurial energy that has been bottled up for far too long in the Caribbean.

Our regional society is the product of the ordeal of migrant labour. The conditions under which the Caribbean labour force has been required over time to relate to our regional economy – beginning with slavery – have been the shabbiest part of our tortured economic history.

Economic integration in today's Caribbean would be a sterile and meaningless exercise were it not to have, at its very centre, a new dispensation, involving new rules for labour mobility, that affords the ordinary man and the ordinary woman the prospect of improving their circumstances by having a new and improved relationship with a new regional economy.

As Barbadian families in the past have owed their very livelihood to the opportunity that was afforded us to access what Guyana had to offer, I trust that Guyanese families will be able today to improve their lot by having a share in what we have in Barbados.

Our Caribbean Single Market and Economy also offers our producers the opportunities to slip the boundaries of small markets. It can also widen our options to create more competitive enterprises by enabling them to have access, without restrictions, to regional pools of capital and skills.

I could go on.

I however rather prefer to say that the benefits we seek from the CSME will not be achieved without sustained commitment and courage.

We must never forget that the Political Federation of the West Indies floundered not so much because of political or constitutional issues, but largely because of irreconcilable economic and financial differences.

Let us therefore as we set out on this new endeavour in Caribbean Unity acknowledge that respective nations in our region come to this moment with widely differing capabilities to participate in, and to benefit from the economic integration that has been designed.

The immediate challenge before us is to put the mechanisms in place to ensure that a Caribbean Single Market and Economy does not become a permanent coalition of unequals, but that its benefits are shared by all.

The member States of the Caribbean have also evolved as economic systems distinctly separated from each other, but closely and effectively integrated into the economics of the advanced, metropolitan economics.

It would be illusory and disingenuous not to accept that our regional economy, even with the advent of the CSME, will still be responsive in many respects, largely to extra regional demand.

We must however, make the CSME **matter** by enabling it to add value to Caribbean development by accomplishing things in those areas where our traditional relationships have failed us – achieving food security on a regional basis, inserting a regional economy into the global economy in circumstances where it would be virtually impossible to do so successfully on an individual basis to mention but a few areas.

I wish again, on this matter to emphasise that the CSME represents the most effective means by which the individual economies of our region can be successfully integrated into the evolving global economic system on terms that will enable us to minimize the costs and dislocation that ensue from that integration, while maximizing the potential benefits. However, the onerous demands of the various negotiating theatres we now find ourselves in require nothing but the most sophisticated and dedicated levels of cooperation on our part. The Caribbean Community cannot succeed in today's world if it speaks in a weak and ineffectual voice with uncertain sound. We should also not expect that our external partners will sit patiently in our waiting rooms while we sort out our

internal affairs. The external challenges facing the Caribbean community in a shrinking and uncertain world, and the questions we must resolve about our own shape and structure are inseparably linked.

This gives a special urgency to this enterprise to create the CSME in the shortest practical time.

Prime Minister Patterson, you must allow me this last opportunity in your presence, on Jamaican soil, in your capacity as Prime Minister of Jamaica to salute the contribution you have made to Caribbean unity and development.

The thirty (30) years you have devoted to the service of Caribbean integration dealing with some of its most demanding matters, have not to date been exceeded by any Caribbean citizen, and it is hardly likely to be exceeded by that of any citizen of the future.

It is the fact that such monumental efforts can come from a citizen of the Caribbean that gives us the confidence to believe that we can make the CSME work.

Your friends in Barbados salute you, and wish you every blessing in your retirement.

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Prime Minister with lead responsibility for the implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy, this is for me a proud yet sobering moment. I am forced to reflect on where we have come from, full in the knowledge that none of us was there when this all began. I am equally aware of where this region must go, again cognizant of the fact that none of us might be there when the Caribbean Community reaches its desired destination. The task for us is to do what we can here and now to ensure a safe and successful onward journey.

Let us, therefore, to the task.