

"The Caribbean Reality in the Americas"



Address

by

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to

THE INTER AMERICAN DIALOGUE

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**Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
President and Officers of the Inter-American Dialogue,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

I am pleased to be addressing the Inter-American Dialogue. Let me first express particular appreciation to my friend of many years, Peter Hakim, for thinking of me and indeed the Caribbean, at this time. This man of boundless energy leads the Dialogue with passion as it undertakes the important work of promoting greater exchange and understanding across the Americas.

Distinguished guests, the conduct of CARICOM's foreign relations is predicated on the need to secure our future in the face of a rapidly changing global environment. To do so we must overcome the challenges we face as small, open and vulnerable economies. We are forced to do so within time frames for adjustment far less generous than those which our more developed partners afforded themselves. While a few countries within the Community have some natural resources, our principal resource is our human capital. Throughout their history Caribbean people

have strived to adhere to the best principles of democracy, good governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights and social justice. These have all been at the forefront of our development. Today these attributes form the essential platform from which we face the future.

Rededicating themselves to earlier efforts at integration, Caribbean governments and people are forging ahead to establish a single economic space for our people. The Caribbean Community Single Market and Single Economy (CSME) is our bridgehead into the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the European Union (EU) and the entire global economy being shaped in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The CSME, together with the coordination of Community external relations, is at the leading edge of our efforts to anticipate and adjust to the realities of the international environment. This is a work in progress and is, for us, a long term goal from which we cannot be distracted or deterred. Today, even as new challenges daily occupy our attention, ours is the longest functioning effort at economic integration after the European Union, bringing together fourteen small developing countries including a least developed country, Haiti and a heavily indebted poor country, Guyana.

The countries of the Caribbean Community are fully cognizant of the needs to make adjustments in the face of increasing globalization and have made remarkable progress in restructuring their economies. A number of new sectors have emerged especially in the area of services despite the formidable challenges that these small vulnerable economies face. The pace and direction in which our economies progress or regress however, are almost entirely dictated by forces within the economies of our more developed partners. We are helpless to insulate ourselves from the periodic shocks, economic and otherwise, that assail us from these quarters.

In several important instances where the Caribbean has demonstrated a comparative advantage, the countries of the developed world have sought to frustrate these efforts. For example, offshore financial services have been subjected to a concerted attempt by OECD countries to inhibit this development even though similar regimes are accepted and supported within the USA and in other OECD countries. The actions of the OECD countries were arbitrary and unilateral, failing to involve Caribbean governments in formulating a suitable multilateral regime. We in the Caribbean maintain that transparent and inclusive multilateral decision-making is critical for protecting the rights of small states in international

trade. I assure you that the Caribbean wants to be a competitor. However, it does not help when the decisions of groups such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in whose deliberations we have no say, cut us off at the knees when we do become competitive. If we were not competitive there would be no quarrel. I here echo the call by the Prime Minister of Barbados the Rt. Owen Arthur, first made at the International Conference on Financing for Development, in Monterrey, Mexico in 2002 for the creation of an international tax organization under the auspices of the United Nations, to oversee global cooperation in cross border tax matters. I regret that thus far efforts to advance this proposal have fallen considerably short of our expectations.

I must speak to CARICOM'S relationship with Haiti - a CARICOM Member State, Cuba - a member of the wider CARIFORUM Group and Venezuela. Despite differences in size, the countries of CARICOM can have a positive influence on these countries. It is imperative that the relationship between these and ourselves come to a place where we can all share in the benefits of economic integration. We know also that the Inter-American Dialogue has an active interest in these countries and we would wish to explore with you the opportunities for greater cooperation.

The situation in Haiti is occupying the attention of every hemispheric institution. This troubled Republic has lurched from crisis to crisis. Caribbean countries continue to be tireless in their efforts to assist Haiti. We have never failed in our commitment to engage the Haitian people in their quest to create strong democratic institutions and a better way of life. We have shown this in our dealings on Haiti within the Caribbean Community, the OAS, the African, Caribbean and Pacific group, the United Nations and in fact all fora. Haiti remains a member of the Caribbean Community. It is suspended from the councils of CARICOM at this time. The Government of Barbados is convinced that full engagement with Haiti best serves the interest of the Haitian people at this most difficult time and best reflects our stated desire to accompany the Haitian people in their long and difficult struggle. This is a task from which we cannot shirk. Let there be no doubt, we expect the Interim Administration in Haiti to act on its stated commitment and in keeping with the high standards set by the Caribbean Community, articulated in its Charter of Civil Society, as regards the rule of law, equal justice for all, democracy and good governance. We expect that there will be full compliance with the provision of OAS Resolution 2058 on the “Situation in Haiti: Strengthening Democracy in Haiti” and that municipal, national and presidential elections will be held in

2005 as promised. In this regard, Barbados is working with the Multinational Task Force to help put the electoral process in place at this time.

There are new political realities which are inescapable. It must be recognized that democracy in Haiti, and indeed in other so-called emerging democracies in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Pacific in the twenty-first Century, will not necessarily resemble the democracy which we have evolved. Even our own democracies will by definition evolve further in these early decades of the new century. The institutions which underpin democracy and which we take for granted – an independent judiciary, a representative, participatory freely elected Parliament, a labor movement which is an integral part of the social partnership which comprises government, labour and the private sector- these and other institutions are non-existent in Haiti. The struggle for democracy in Haiti will be a medium and long-term effort. Where democratic institutions are weak or non-existent, then the democracy will be weak or non-existent. Correspondingly, where they are strong, democracy will be strong.

Barbados and all Caribbean Community countries embrace Cuba as a *bona fide* sister-state in the Caribbean region and we are

committed to a policy of constructive engagement with its government and people. We do not believe that efforts to isolate Cuba, through exclusion from participation in hemispheric bodies like the OAS and the emerging Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), or measures that create greater hardship for the Cuban people, such as the longstanding trade embargo, will foster change in Cuba.

Barbados is totally in agreement with the open letter of the Inter-American Dialogue to Secretary of State Colin Powell regarding the Commission for Assistance to free Cuba and like you, we are deeply concerned about the ambivalence surrounding the proposed policy for a peaceful change in Cuba. The Caribbean Community, in its engagement with Cuba, has held close to the principles at the core of our respective constitutions which are enshrined in the CARICOM Charter of Civil Society. Barbados and I feel safe to say, the entire Caribbean Community, cannot accept a “regime change”, exogenously imposed upon the people of Cuba, to be, in any way, a viable option.

Our relationship is particularly well developed with Venezuela, a nation that proudly proclaims its Antillean history, culture and

connections. It was with a deep sense of satisfaction that we accepted the successful conduct of the recent referendum in Venezuela. We look forward now to a period of calm in which the process of healing and dialogue necessary for better understanding between competing groups can occur. Venezuela needs all of its people working together if it is to move forward and continue to be a leading engine of development in the hemisphere and the beacon of democracy which its founding father intended. It behooves all that cherish democracy to do what we can to give Venezuelans this space.

It is necessary that I say a few words on CARICOM's relationship with Central America, which has come through some difficult times in recent years. Differences over banana exports to Europe and other policy differences, sometimes more nuanced than substantive, have marked this relationship. Happily we are presently seeing some of the best of times with our Central American partners and we consider the relationship now to be on a more stable footing. We have found common cause in the FTAA negotiations on the issue of special and differential treatment for the smaller and disadvantaged economies. The Caribbean Community is pleased to have supported the campaign of H.E Dr Miguel Angel Rodriguez for the post of Secretary General of the OAS. His imminent assumption of office will be a

further acknowledgement from the Inter-American community that its smallest members can play a leading role in hemispheric affairs. This follows two distinguished Barbadians at the head of Inter-American institutions – Sir George Alleyne recently retired from PAHO/WHO and Dr. Chelston Brathwaite currently Director of IICA. We look forward, during Dr. Rodriguez’s tenure, to seeing progress on several of the issues which the Caribbean Community holds special and on which we have made our position known.

Colleagues, almost ten years ago, thirty-four Heads of State and Government of this hemisphere met in Miami, in their first Summit of the Americas and agreed upon a comprehensive plan of action for the Americas, including the Caribbean. One of the major planks of that programme is the promotion of prosperity through economic integration and free trade. This bold and far-reaching initiative of our Heads inspired in the people of the hemisphere a new hope of a better tomorrow and renewed confidence in our political leaders.

In the Caribbean we see the FTAA not only as facilitating our necessary integration into the global economy, but also as providing a major

opportunity for our people to develop meaningful trade in goods and services with the other countries of this hemisphere. Today, we stand in great fear of seeing our hope dashed by the vacillation of some of the Governments of this hemisphere.

Despite numerous official pronouncements of its full and unwavering commitment to the FTAA process and its successful conclusion, the US Government has been less than consistent in its own approach to the FTAA. When it became clear that the US would not be able to stipulate the terms of the FTAA but would have to negotiate, it resorted to bilateral options. This network of bilateral agreements strategically places the US at the centre of a “hub and spoke” network, which has in effect “Balkanized” the hemisphere. It does not mean that others are not negotiating bilaterally but these negotiations do not have the same effect.

Ironically the US continues to exhort CARICOM countries to make the necessary adjustments to prepare for free trade and criticized us as not being serious about trade because at this time we have not joined the queue for a FTA with the US. Nothing could be further from the truth as we are currently involved in negotiations in the WTO and FTAA and with the EU

and Canada in order to complement trade agreements with Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. We are also in preliminary dialogue with the MERCOSUR. These are the actions of countries that are seriously committed to trade.

The Caribbean has expended a great deal of time, energy and scarce financial and human resources in preparing for and participating in the FTAA negotiations. This was done because we believe in what the FTAA has to offer us and the entire hemisphere. In fact, CARICOM does not consider that there is any better, viable alternative to the FTAA. I would like to urge all member states and in particular, the United States, to go back to the negotiating table and complete the work which our Heads of Government and State mandated us to do. So much hangs on the successful completion of this task; indeed, the prospect of a brighter tomorrow for millions of our peoples depends on our bringing it to good resolution. We cannot afford to resile from this mandate.

Friends,

Committed as we are to the fight against terrorism, the greater danger to our human security is the threat from natural disasters of every

kind including earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods and hurricanes, HIV/AIDS and poverty. Volcanic eruption has reduced the island of Montserrat, once called the Emerald Isle of the Caribbean, to a parched desert of pyroclastic flows and ash. Hurricane Ivan in one fell night devastated the island of Grenada. An economy has disappeared. Sometimes this happens two years in a row or as in the case of The Bahamas, a few years ago, twice in the same year. Some of us are constantly repairing and replacing infrastructure, replanting crops and rebuilding our very lives. When a hurricane hurts two or three or seven big cities or states in the United States, the other states help those affected to rebuild. An entire state or city has never been wiped out. Can you begin to imagine the implications when a small state is reduced to rubble in less than a day? Terrorists could hardly do a more horribly effective job. These factors are never taken into account when GDP is being computed. CARICOM Heads have met in special emergency session and sought all means available to work toward the rehabilitation of Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique. But the reality is that CARICOM by itself does not have the capability to cope. There needs to be an international donor conference to help Grenada.

To highlight Grenada is not to overlook the damage done by Hurricane Frances to the Bahamas nor Hurricane Ivan to Tobago, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Jamaica, the Cayman Islands and Cuba all in the course of the past few weeks.

Distinguished guests, much has been said about the need for concerted action in the war on terrorism. The Government of Barbados is proud of our efforts to work with our closest neighbours in the fight against global terrorism beyond our shores. However, we are concerned by the lack of discussion on what we believe to be an equally, if not more, important war that is being waged. I speak here of the war of ideas.

If, in time, the war of ideas is to be won, there must be consistency in the message we represent. We have to be consistent: in condemning all who would use violence and terror as a means of achieving their objectives; in condemning those who would use measures other than those constitutionally established to change elected governments; and in scrupulously supporting the democratic process, irregardless of whether we favour the winners or not. We must be consistent and true to the high standards we espouse and would have others follow. It is imperative if our

deeply held principles about democracy, governance and freedoms are to be believed and embraced by those who would attack us.

This commitment to consistency in our message will also go a long way to arrest the decline of public confidence in the multilateral system. We must do more to ensure that policies affecting global publics are well founded, well consulted and faithfully explained to our electorates. Failure to do so will result in an ever widening gap between what we do as policy makers and what our people really want. We must address this issue without delay and with due frankness if we are not to find ourselves increasingly irrelevant to the man and woman in the street from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska and all the nations in between.

The task of bringing our work to the peoples of the hemisphere is not reserved for governments or institutions of the Inter-American System only. It is a task in which all must engage and must feel that we are not at liberty to abstain. Organizations such as the Inter-American Dialogue have played and can continue to play a crucial role in this effort. More debate on Caribbean issues, including opportunities like this one today for other regional leaders, increased linkages with Caribbean institutions and

intellectuals, promoting exchanges are activities that come to mind immediately and which are well within our capacities. In so doing bodies such as the Dialogue are answering the call to hemispheric duty.

The people of Barbados and the Caribbean have historically answered the call to duty across our hemisphere and we stand ready and able to do so again and again whenever that call is heard.

I thank you for your attention.

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