



Press Release



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(CARICOM Secretariat, Georgetown, Guyana) Attached are Remarks made by the Honourable Said Musa, Prime Minister, Minister of National Development and the Public Service at the Sixteenth Meeting of the Council for Trade And Economic Development (COTED), 4 March 2004, Belize City, Belize.

**SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE COUNCIL FOR
TRADE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

1st - 5th March 2004,

Belize City, Belize

Remarks by Hon. Said Musa

Prime Minister

Minister of National Development

And the Public Service

Hon. Julian Hunte, President of the United Nations General Assembly, and Chair of COTED

Ministers of Foreign Trade and other Heads of Delegations

Dr. Edwin Carrington, Secretary General of the Caribbean Community

Amb. Richard Bernal, Director General, Regional Negotiating Machinery

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Delegates and Friends

To visiting delegates I wish you a very warm welcome to Belize!

It is an honour for Belize to host this 16th meeting of COTED. We do so at a time when the challenges confronting our Caribbean states in the trade arena are critical. These dramatic changes in world trade demand that we be ever more coordinated, united and vocal as we seek to defend and advocate the interests of our peoples and our respective states.

On Sunday last, we lost one of our region's greatest leaders – Sir Harold “Bree” St. John of Barbados. He distinguished himself as the quintessential trade negotiator on behalf of Barbados, the Caribbean and the wider ACP. I offer, on behalf of the people of Belize our deepest condolences to his family and to Barbados.

CARICOM Unity

Perhaps, there has never been a time more demanding of Caribbean unity in trade negotiations than the present. Recent developments within CARICOM demand mature responses. We are all unreservedly committed to deepening the integration process. Differences there will be many, but divisions there should not be any. Every facility available to us under the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas should be utilized to ensure that our common interests remain paramount. This meeting of COTED must provide clear signals for Heads of Government to consider at the upcoming inter-sessional meeting.

The strategic session held at Caye Chapel yesterday was successful. That session was important because for the first time CARICOM trade ministers, their officials and advisers met in a dedicated way to consider the major issues confronting us. The complexities, challenges and changes on the trade agenda require CARICOM to be

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ever more strategic in our approaches. No region in the world is called upon to engage simultaneously in as many fora of negotiations. We look forward to receiving the decisions of Ministers arising from yesterday's deliberations.

The Caribbean Court of Justice

The single most important challenge facing us as a Caribbean Community in 2004 is the successful establishment of the Caribbean Court of Justice. Our approach to its establishment must be regional, and should not be driven by domestic political imperatives. Each CARICOM state is required to complete different legal, constitutional and administrative arrangements in order to ensure the successful establishment of the CCJ. I appeal to all stakeholders, and especially to opposition parties across the Caribbean to let us come together in good faith to ensure that we complete this noble task.

We are the architects of our common Caribbean destiny. CARICOM needs the CCJ now more than ever. Let us not fail our peoples!

Flexibility and Gradualism

For us in Belize, our trade negotiating strategy is grounded in the Principle of Gradualism. We accept the inevitability of change. But change must serve the common good. Our small size; the nascency of our development; and our limited resource base all dictate that our insertion into the global economy must be gradual. We believe that that is also the CARICOM view. The longstanding trade arrangements, which we have enjoyed, should only be dismantled if the new arrangements allow us to continue to develop and increase the quality of life of our people.

There is a view that some of the positions we have taken are intransigent. That view is erroneous. We regard our positions as principled and taken after careful study and advice. We seek, like all out trading partners, to protect and advance our interests above all. At the same time however, as responsible members of the world community we are prepared to be flexible. Negotiations require compromises. Flexibility makes success possible. But as we move forward in trade negotiations, we in CARICOM hold fast to one principle: we require special and differential treatment.

The COTED Agenda

The work you will undertake today and tomorrow is demanding. The work plan for the creation of the CSME is high on the agenda. We must redouble our efforts. Domestic fiscal challenges in all our countries test our commitment to the Plan of action. But there is no turning back. The successful development and implementation of the CSME is a precondition for our success as a single economic space.

The WTO, FTAA and EU-ACP negotiations continue to move forward at a hectic pace. We must be equal to the challenge.

It is our common position that the Doha Development Agenda must be completed at the earliest possible time. We should not however dilute the 'development dimension' of the round in the name of forward movement. The alliances forged in Cancun served us well. The positions we adopted were principled and informed. The recent mission undertaken by the Commonwealth, in which we were ably represented by Senior Minister Dame Billie Miller, reveals that there is hope that 2004 will not be a 'lost year'. With a cautious eye, CARICOM must be prepared to join this developing consensus.

Heads of Government, meeting last year in St. Lucia, authorized the launch of the EPA negotiations with the European Union. This has taken on even more significance in light of the challenge to the EU's sugar regime presently wending its way through the WTO dispute process. We look forward to the result of your deliberations in the special session on sugar, which is to be held later today. Let us approach this sugar issue with the harsh lessons learnt in the Banana case uppermost in our mind. We cannot afford to be blinded by the legalities of the issues alone. Our approach to sugar must be holistic and enlightened. Let us not delude ourselves; tough decisions will have to be taken. Let us prepare ourselves to take them.

The new approach to the FTAA negotiations crafted at the Miami Ministerial remains a matter of grave concern for us in the region. It is Belize's view that deadlines set years ago should not be used to pressure us into accepting a deal that's bad. The FTAA must redound to the benefit of all countries engaged in the process. Time is not our enemy; development is our goal.

Conclusion

COTED has responsibility to fashion the region's stance in trade negotiations. The task of shaping regional responses and approaches is not easy. It is technical and subject to competing national interests. But that is the nature of your task.

But in a very real sense, we are here to work for the average Caribbean man and woman who slip from slumber at the crack of dawn to catch flying fish, to cut oranges, bananas or sugarcane, or to rake the seaweed from our beaches. We are here in the name of Caribbean lawyers and doctors, the artists and the musicians, tour guides and hotel workers, the teachers and nurses, and the industrialists and merchants. For them we must ensure that trade offers an opportunity to make an honest and respectable living. We must ensure that they are able to educate their children, feed, clothe and house them. It is for them that COTED works.

I offer you every good wish for a successful meeting.

Thank you.