



GOVERNMENT OF BARBADOS

ADDRESS BY
THE RT. HON. OWEN ARTHUR
PRIME MINISTER OF BARBADOS
AND
CHAIRMAN OF CARICOM

AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY
OF THE
28TH CARICOM HEADS OF GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE

BRIDGETOWN

BARBADOS

JULY 1, 2007

Esteemed Heads of Government of CARICOM

Secretary General of CARICOM, Dr. Edwin Carrington

Minister of Government and Members of Parliament of Barbados

Heads of International and regional Organisations

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps

Other Specially invited guests

Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honour for me, as Prime Minister of Barbados, to accept, for the third time, the baton of leadership entrusted to me as Chairman of the Caribbean Community. It is a weighty responsibility, especially at this critical juncture in Caribbean development, but I look forward to the challenge. I am committed to working with my colleagues and all of the region's stakeholders during my 6-month term to propel the community forward in all aspects of our complex integration project.

I wish to convey my sincerest thanks to my predecessor, Dr. the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves who carried the mantle of leadership at what was for him, a difficult time, and with whom I have enjoyed a close working relationship in the foregoing months. He has always been and remains a fierce and true defender of our Caribbean civilization. I look forward to his continued support as a member of the Bureau.

The Government and people of Barbados are pleased not only to offer you a warm Barbadian welcome, but also our most historic setting within which to conduct your opening proceedings.

There is something about the precincts of Parliament that, everywhere, inspires a respectful awe.

Trollope captured it well in his 1864 Novel "*Can You Forgive Her*" in these terms:

"I have told myself, in anger and in grief, that to die and not have won that right of way, though but for a session – not to have passed through those lamps – is to die and not to have done that which it most becomes an Englishman to have achieved".

There is also something uplifting and awe-inspiring about the business of the people of the Caribbean Community.

We are therefore pleased to offer you the full precincts of the Parliament Buildings of Barbados as the venue for this ceremony. We are proud of our parliamentary traditions which, as many of you know, go back, uninterrupted, to 1639, some 368 years. The Parliament of Barbados is the third oldest in the Western Hemisphere, but the buildings which currently house it are of a somewhat more recent vintage- each only 130 years.

The Buildings have been the subject of the most loving and energetic renovation, the second phase completed only this year. Both projects were carried out under the watchful eye of my Cabinet's most formidable Architect, Builder, and Project Manager-in-Chief, none other than the member of parliament for the City of Bridgetown herself, Dame Billie Miller, who manages also to find time to be my Senior Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade.

Those of you who know her will be aware of her eye for detail and her devotion to perfection. I am tempted to describe these beautiful structures as “the buildings that Billie built”... I will, however, refrain from doing so lest I be misunderstood to mean that she was already around when they were first constructed. In energy, in passion, in ability, and in dedication to duty Dame Billie is easily the double of most ordinary mortals. But not so in age.

On a more serious note, I wish publicly to thank and congratulate her and all those who have laboured long and hard to make the arrangements for this Conference, which, I trust, will fulfill the expectations of the people of the region. Today, also, my fellow Heads of Government and I are especially honoured to welcome as our special guest Congressman Charles Rangel, Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee of the United States Congress and a treasured friend of the Caribbean.

As a founding member and former Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, Chairman Rangel has been a vital partner to the region as we have sought to keep the Caribbean, and its concerns, squarely in the sights of the US Congress. I must especially express the region's profound appreciation for the efforts of the Congressional Black Caucus, specifically for its role in having the month of June designated as Caribbean Heritage Month in the United States and for the successful outcomes of the recently-concluded Conference on the Caribbean. The leadership and support of Chairman Rangel have been central to our efforts at building mutual understanding between the Caribbean and the United States, and we are delighted to have this opportunity to pay public tribute to this outstanding statesman.

Mr. Chairman, we are honoured to have you here among us. We look forward to our dialogue with you during our session tomorrow when we review the gains achieved in Washington last month and chart the path for a strengthened relationship with Congress, and a modern, vibrant, and mutually beneficial partnership with the United States.

I will restrain myself in these remarks to the presentation of a simple perspective of what it is that we are seeking to achieve at this Heads of Government Conference and the relationship any gains will bear to the realization of the goals that our integration movement has been intended to accomplish.

By way of context, it would be useful if we were to remind ourselves that we are not seeking through our regional integration effort, to create a Single Caribbean Nation State, in the political and constitutional terms in which the concept of a nation state is generally understood.

Rather, we are seeking to constitute our region as a Community, a Community that draws upon a common history and culture, and a spirit of kith and kin, to forge new forms of cooperation among ourselves, in search of a common destiny that is brighter and better than would be the case were we to each strike out on our own individual accord.

Our Community, thus conceived, was intended to be somewhat more than a unified Regional Economy, although economic integration was necessarily central to its purposes.

It was also especially intended to establish programmes and mechanisms by which cooperation could be undertaken across all the social, cultural and environmental sectors which directly affect the quality of life of all of the people of our Community. The building of a Community, in both spirit and practice, was supposed also to lead us in the direction of pooling our institutional resources in a manner that would enable us to provide common services, in a cost effective way, in all the spheres necessary to build modern societies, or common services to enable us better to stave off the impact of common threats.

We also committed ourselves to building a Community through which we would deal with the rest of the world by adopting common or coordinated stances in respect of trade, our international relations, and our foreign policy in general.

The Community of nations that Caricom was designed to bring into effect was therefore meant to be a community for all. It was intended to be a community through which not just economic, but also social progress and benefits would be realized by the participating States and the citizens of our respective societies.

It was intended to be a Community that is faithful to the precepts of equitable development carried out within the context of social justice.

The indigenous stroke that we are most often inclined to play in the Caribbean is that of being our own harshest critics.

Despite our constant criticism of our own efforts, it is a most commendable achievement, however, that despite the harshness of the international environment within which our own integration exercise is taking place, an environment that has seen many other attempts at integration falter and collapse, we have kept the hopes and ambitions of the integration process well and truly alive.

Our Caribbean Community today enjoys a respect and standing among the family of nations for our capacity to speak with one voice, for the partnerships we have managed to put in place for the benefit of our people, for the scope and scale of integration we have achieved.

We should, nonetheless, properly enquire among ourselves as to whether we are succeeding in creating in our region an all-inclusive Community that meets the needs of all, and a model of integration that offers the respective Caribbean States a prospect of sustainable development that could not be envisioned by each acting on its own.

This Conference here at Bridgetown holds the promise of being of historic significance in so far as it has been conceived and structured to enable us to address these essential issues.

It can certainly make all of the difference in respect of the economic future that the Caribbean Community comes to enjoy.

There is no doubt that much of the energy of the integration effort in the Caribbean region has been channeled along the economic course.

The sheer imperative of responding to the complexities of economic life in today's world, gave rise in 1989 to the Grand Anse Declaration, central to which was the undertaking to constitute our region as a Single Market and a Single Economy.

Last year, participating States put in place the arrangements to remove the over 400 barriers and restrictions on the movement of goods, services, the flow of capital, the movement of people and skills, and the capacity of our citizens to establish enterprises, thus constituting our region as a Single Market.

After an unprecedented process of consultations involving all the relevant stakeholders across the region, at this Conference we will be in a position to receive, and, as we should, approve the Report of Professor Girvan and the Special Task Force :”*Towards A Single Economy And a Single Development Vision.*”

It will serve as the basis for decisions by Heads of Government on a road map for the implementation of the Single Economy. Once approved we can in earnest initiate the actions this year to put in place some of the essential measures to create a Single Economy and to bring that Single Economy fully into operation by 2015.

The creation of a Single Economy, as is generally known, will entail measures to support production integration, the harmonization and coordination of economic policies pursued in the region, the building of new regional institutions to carry out the regional policies, and new arrangements for economic cooperation to ensure that the benefits of economic integration are more fairly distributed.

I strongly urge the adoption of the Girvan/Task Force Report on the Single Economy.

Actions proposed for implementation over the next 18 months include the adoption of the Caricom Investment Code, the Caricom Financial Services Agreement, the extension of the free-movement of labour to a wider category of our citizens, and early action on the Jagdeo Initiative in respect of collaboration on Production Integration in Agriculture.

There are also very clear and strong recommendations for our approval in relation to the integration of the Region's financial and Capital Market, and the Establishment of a Regional Stock Exchange.

Of even greater significance are the recommendations in respect of the Establishment and commencement of operations of a Regional Development Fund to provide the resources to enable our Lesser Developed Countries to benefit more from, and to be properly fitted into the Single Regional Economy and Single Market Space.

I cannot over emphasise how important it is for us to establish, as recommended, the Regional Competition Commission in Suriname by November this year, to give ourselves the assurance that our regional market will not only be free, but will also be a fair market.

You must allow me to use this occasion to express our gratitude to Professor Girvan, the members of the Task Force on the Single Economy, and all the stakeholders drawn from the Private Sector, the Labour Movement, the UWI, the NGO community and the Institutions of our Civil Society who have all contributed to the preparation of this Report that is before us for our adoption.

I wish also to express special thanks to the European Union, the IADB and CIDA for their generous financial contributions that will go a long way to meeting the costs of carrying out the work programme in support of the CSME.

All of this is commendable. But realistically, will it suffice to ensure that we build a Community in the interest of all?

Already, issues regarding the fair distribution of benefits from the CSME are surfacing.

Intra-Regional exports have grown between 1995 and 2005 from 13% to over 20% of the total exports of the region. But this growth has largely been to the benefit of one country, Trinidad and Tobago. This is unsustainable.

There has also been an upsurge in intra-regional investment. Most of the investments, however, have taken the form of mergers and acquisition rather than investment in new production capacity. While some element of corporate consolidation is to be expected, it would not be desirable for the principal effects of capital mobility in the region to be the re-incarnation of the old regional corporate economic system in new institutional garb.

In addition, while over 4000 skill certificates have been issued to support the movement of skills, there is a very uneven concentration, across countries, suggesting that only a few countries are carrying the weight of providing a market for the workers of the region.

In the absence of corrective mechanisms, these asymmetries in the distribution of the benefits from integration will only worsen.

There are also a number of other critical issues, thrown up by the coming into operation of the CSME, and others concerning the scope of development that will ensue from integration that now stand to be addressed if we are all to go forward, successfully together.

First, the CSME confers economic rights on the citizens of the Community to seek and hold employment in countries other than those of their nationality. What social rights and entitlement of access to social and welfare services will such citizens enjoy as they move from one country to the other?

Secondly, there are countries that are members of the Community that do not participate in the CSME.

Can we not conceive of a programme of integration outside and beyond the mere economic sphere, addressing fundamental quality of life issues in respect of education, health care, the protection of our environment, technological development, transportation, security, support for marginalized groups, cooperation in the fight against poverty and towards the achievement of the Millennium Development goals as a collective regional exercise that can benefit both CSME and non-CSME members of our Community?

Can we dare to envision therefore a Community for all in terms of the geographical embrace of the entire region, as well as the extension of benefits beyond those conceptualised from the CSME?

We can. History is on our side.

Caricom's most impressive contribution to the welfare of the citizens of the region has ensued from the programme of functional cooperation which has grown in intensity and scope since 1974.

Such Functional Cooperation seems, however, to have been accorded a second class significance, and is the least publicized form of cooperation within the Community.

There is an urgent need before us to correct this imbalance.

Great dividends can ensue from deepening our cooperation in the area of health care. We need to act on the Report of the Task Force to finance the capital Development of the University of the West Indies. The unprecedented level of cooperation in hosting the Cricket World Cup has left us mechanisms of cooperation in managing our single space and our security arrangements which must urgently be followed up and made permanent aspects of our regional endeavours.

Similar cooperation can be carried out in areas such as the reform of our telecommunications sector, Research and Development, the development of our cultural identities, among others.

I particularly wish to stress the need for functional cooperation in the area of communications.

In 1974 when the founding fathers created the Caribbean Community, recognizing that you cannot have a community without communications, they all agreed to invest in a single Intra-Regional Airline.

A similar vision and resolve is now required of this generation of Caribbean leaders.

At this Heads of Government Conference the opportunity is being grasped to revisit and develop a broader perspective to all of these issues which together constitute the Functional Cooperation Programme of the Caribbean Community. It is the priority matter before this Conference.

In dealing with it we must not see functional cooperation as only a separate and distinct set of activities. Indeed, we must see a broader and revitalized programme of Functional Cooperation as the essential glue that binds all forms of cooperation in our Community together, and enables us to contemplate the prospect that all people, no matter where located in our Community, will derive benefits from sharing in the effort to build a Community of Nations in the Caribbean.

This Conference should advance our regional prospect by enabling us to accept the road map to be followed in concluding the creation of the CSME.

But I do believe that it can come to be remembered for the new dispensation it calls into existence to make our integration movement matter more in the quality of life enjoyed by our people through the priority that over the next few days is to be accorded to developing an ambitious programme for regional social development and functional cooperation.

It is an ambitious agenda. But the progress we have made, despite the odds, in bringing the CSME into existence, should give us the confidence to take the road least traveled – that of collaborative effort in developing our social systems, our common services and the institutions which directly affect the quality of life of our people.

It is good that this Opening Ceremony is taking place on the doorsteps of the Museum of the National Heroes of Barbados.

In that Museum are to be found memorabilia saluting the work of some of our greatest regionalists – Adams, the only Prime Minister of a Federated West Indies, Barrow the founding father of both Carifta and Caricom; Springer a founding father of the UWI; Walcott a Chief Architect of the regional Labour Movement.

There is celebrated the life of Sobers the quintessential representation of the spirit of the thing that most embodies Caribbean excellence.

I trust that their example will inspire our work over the next few days.

And drawing from their example, I promise that as Chairman of our Conference, I will be a true and faithful servant of the people of the Caribbean.

-----0o0-----