

FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS

8TH MINISTERIAL MEETING

MIAMI, November 20, 2003

Statement by the Hon. Eamon Courtenay

Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade, Belize

The Draft Ministerial Declaration introduces a fundamental shift in the vision of the FTAA. In 1994, we started this process together, traveling in one vehicle in search of economic and social development for all our peoples. Today we remain faithful to that vision; but we have agreed to realize our vision by a different course.

The draft declaration provides for us all to continue travelling together, but only for a part of the voyage. It is proposed that we will reach a point on this trip when we will all have a chance to move forward bilaterally or plurilaterally.

This change in approach is dictated by political realistics. CARICOM is aware of the challenges and the need for us to ensure that we leave Miami with a positive message and keeping hope alive for our peoples.

As we look to the year ahead we in CARICOM have every confidence and expectation that as the TNC "develop[s] a common and balanced set of rights and obligations applicable to all countries" due regard will be given to special and differential treatment for smaller economies.

Our ambition for the FTAA is no less than that of any other country; indeed our ambitions may exceed some countries. Permit me to remind you that when we speak of smaller economies we mean small. For Belize, our GDP is less than US\$1 billion; we have less than 300,000 people; over 60% of our population is under 25 years of age. And we depend in the main on sugar, citrus and bananas. There are CARICOM member states with populations of less than 50,000; others that depend on bananas alone for survival, and others that depend only on tourism and financial services.

I remind my colleagues of these statistics simply to emphasize the challenge we face next year. The differences in the sizes of our economies and the differences in the levels of development demand that we find new and creative ways to ensure that the FTAA brings benefits to all our countries and all our peoples. Let us move forward, big and small, together.