

ADDRESS BY
BY THE HONOURABLE PATRICK MANNING
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
AT THE OPENING SESSION OF
A REGIONAL AGRICULTURE DONOR CONFERENCE
CROWNE PLAZA, PORT OF SPAIN
2ND JUNE 2007

Mr. Chairman, Dr. Edwin Carrington, Secretary General of the Caribbean Community

His Excellency the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, Mr. Bharat Jagdeo

The Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dr. the Honourable Ralph Gonzales

The Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, His Excellency Dr. Jacques Diouf

Honourable Ministers of Government

Representatives of International and Regional Organisations

Representatives of Donor Countries and Agencies

Members of the Media

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I welcome the opportunity to address you this morning at this Regional Agriculture Donor Conference jointly sponsored by the CARICOM Secretariat and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. I extend a warm welcome to all visitors to our country for this important meeting and encourage you to have an enjoyable stay in Trinidad and Tobago, including, in keeping with the spirit of your visit, partaking of our unique culinary delights.

Like all other nations, we in CARICOM must continue to ensure that food is available to our populations. Whilst food sufficiency is not possible, given the limitations imposed by geography, we must do our utmost to produce as much as we can if we are to improve the food security of our nations. The agricultural sectors in all our countries are in serious need of modernization to improve efficiency, diversification and productivity. We also need to focus on rural and infrastructural development, including water management, facilitate more research for the development of unique products and very importantly, provide the incentives for investment by the private sector in the agro-industry. We must also now give more serious thought to the rationalization of production, as we move to the realization of the single economy in CARICOM. The theme of this conference therefore points to a fundamental issue in our regional integration movement.

Our situation is made more pressing by external realities and developments. We are among the countries of the African, Caribbean and Pacific group which have experienced the elimination of preferential access for some of our agricultural products to the markets of the European union. The result is

that our banana and sugar industries are either dead or dying, acutely increasing the challenges for our economies and societies.

We are also experiencing some very severe effects of global climate change. Our dry seasons are becoming more severe, and storms and hurricanes are increasing in their destructive passage through the Caribbean Sea. Our situation is now being made more precarious with the increasing use of farm land in some industrialized nations for the production of crops for bio-fuels, a development which is increasing the price of certain basic foods throughout the world.

Food security must therefore be of major concern to us in CARICOM. We in Trinidad and Tobago are positioning ourselves to meet this challenge, which has been underscored by the acute dry season that we experienced this year. We are thankful for the arrival of the rainy season, but recognizing the uncertainties produced by global climate change, we must now reduce our heavy reliance on surface water for human consumption and agricultural production. The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago is now considering the use of desalinated water to ensure the availability of an adequate water supply at all times and to reduce significantly, our dependence on surface sources.

We have also made more land available for food production. Having closed down our sugar company with sensitivity and adequate compensation to the workers, we are now deploying the liberated thousands of acres for the more diversified production of food. We are allocating over seven thousand two-acre plots to the former workers of Caroni Ltd for agricultural production. We have also made capital available to our farmers through our

Agricultural development bank and we are further facilitating their productive capacity through a programme of appropriate subsidies.

Additionally, we are creating ten large scale farms, eight involving participation by the private sector, including established international companies in the field, and two in collaboration with the Government of Cuba, which is internationally renowned for its successful production of food. These large estates will be at least one hundred acres each and will facilitate mass agricultural production. These farms will be one of our main strategies to increase food production in this country for both domestic and external markets.

We are also very aware of the world-wide increase in the occurrence of certain diseases, like cancer, hypertension and obesity, scientifically proven as related to the excessive use of certain chemicals in food production. We are therefore placing emphasis on organic farming and are establishing demonstration farms in strategic locations in our country.

Trinidad and Tobago is an integral part of the efforts being made by CARICOM to achieve food security. We shall therefore, among other things, partner with established international companies for the regional production of food for our populations, especially in those countries of the Community that have the resources, especially land space, for large scale production.

We are therefore making the effort, Ladies and Gentlemen, to achieve food security for our people. But in this globalised world, we need the support of

the international community, especially the industrialized nations of the world. We therefore seriously lament the lack of progress in the stalled Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations which has placed development as its core objective and which is consequently of utmost importance to the developing countries of the world. The fact is Agriculture continues to be the main obstacle to progress in the talks as the protectionist policies in the sector of some major countries run counter to the thoroughly liberalized regime they are advocating in almost all other areas. We have a situation of apparently entrenched stagnation which has defied periodic attempts to jump start the process. Whilst the negotiations languish in this comatose state, the agricultural sector is dying in a great many countries of the developing world; declining from uncompetitiveness, and lack of markets and investment. The result is that poverty is deepening and spreading in countries of the third world, adding to the millions of starving human beings, including so very many children.

The international community must recognize that we are contributing to a global disaster by our failure to achieve an international trading system that is both free and fair. We are producing widespread underdevelopment and its deleterious consequences which include crime, the trade in illegal drugs, the spread of disease, terrorism and environmental degradation to name a few. And none, neither developed nor developing, is immune from these threats which have automatically become international problems in our present globalised world. We all therefore have a vested interest in ensuring that development spreads throughout the world especially in those countries that need it most.

Agriculture has been a pivotal part of the foundation for progress in almost all the progressive countries of the world. We in CARICOM need to strengthen those foundations in our own societies. This conference is therefore most timely. We are grateful to the FAO and its distinguished Director General for the collaboration in this effort. It is yet another example of his untiring efforts to improve food production at the global level and with significant attention being paid to developing countries and countries in transition. We wish to especially thank all donor countries and organizations for their kind concern and generosity, and we give you the assurance of the effective utilization of all resources in the revitalization and modernization of Agriculture in our region.

Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen and Best wishes for a successful conference.