

**FIFTH HEMISPHERIC MINISTERIAL AND FIFTEENTH REGULAR
INTERAMERICAN BOARD OF AGRICULTURE MEETINGS.**

PRIVATE SECTOR DIALOGUE

MONTEGO BAY, OCTOBER 27, 2009.

REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR IRWIN LAROCQUE

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL, TRADE AND ECONOMIC
INTEGRATION, CARICOM SECRETARIAT**

Mr. Chairman;

Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton, Minister of Agriculture and
Fisheries, Jamaica;

Ministers of Agriculture of the Americas,

Director General of IICA, Dr. Chelston Brathwaite;

Specially Invited Guests;

Participants in this important Private Sector Dialogue.

I am pleased to accept this invitation to address you on behalf
of the Secretary General of the Caribbean Community, His
Excellency Edwin Carrington.

At the outset, I wish to take this opportunity to commend Dr. Chelston Brathwaite for his leadership and dedicated service during his tenure as Director-General of the Inter American Institute for Co-operation in Agriculture (IICA). Under his leadership, IICA and CARICOM have forged an even closer working relationship which I am sure will be maintained.

Ladies and gentlemen, over the last decade, most of the countries of the Caribbean Community have experienced declines in real terms in public sector financing for agriculture development; and they have witnessed stagnation and, in some instances, declines in both domestic and foreign direct investments in the sector. The dwindling financial resources available to the sector have resulted in reduced capacity for enhancing food security and rural life in the Caribbean.

Despite the downward trends in resource allocation and the setbacks encountered as a result of the Food Price Shock of 2007, the Caribbean Community remains convinced that agriculture is an important contributor to rural development, employment creation and export earnings, and to the overall sustainable development of its Member States.

However, in order for agriculture to continue to play this significant role in the region's development, the involvement of the private sector is critical. There are many opportunities

available to the private sector to build a thriving agri-business sector. We only need to look at the food import bill, for example, to see where they lie. But we need the enabling environment to stimulate such investment.

Cognizant of the need for such an environment, the Caribbean Community, based on input from public and private stakeholders, has identified nine Key Binding Constraints to agricultural development in the region. These are:

- Limited financing and inadequate levels of new investments
- Outdated and inefficient agricultural health and food safety systems
- Inefficient land and water distribution and management systems
- Deficient and uncoordinated risk management measures, including praedial larceny
- Weak market infrastructure and linkages
- Inadequate research and development
- Lack of skilled human resources
- Fragmented and unorganized private sector
- Inadequate transport systems

With support from strategic partners such as IICA and others, the CARICOM Ministers of Agriculture are working with stakeholders in the industry to alleviate these constraints.

Technical Advisory Committees, chaired by Ministers, benefit from private sector participation. Public sector/private sector partnership, therefore, is an essential element of CARICOM's agriculture development thrust.

In May of this year, the CARICOM Secretariat facilitated a Consultation between the public and private sectors in order to establish stronger institutional collaboration for agribusiness development in the region.

At that Consultation, the private sector called for a platform for on-going public-private sector dialogue that can better inform the Community's decision making process. They recognized the need to strengthen private sector collaboration and to build partnerships among value chain stakeholders. They recommended the establishment of a more effective mechanism for dissemination of information on developments in the sector. They saw as indispensable the need for an effective agriculture marketing information system. And finally, the private sector called for implementation mechanisms that will translate recommendations into meaningful actions.

More recently, CARICOM Heads of Government, at their Thirtieth Meeting at Liliendaal in Guyana in July, agreed on the urgent need for more concerted action among stakeholders in developing and implementing policy incentives and programs that would address these binding constraints and promote

agriculture as a competitive business sector. Among the priority focal areas for action outlined in their Liliendaal Declaration are the following:

- Establishing an effective regime of sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures, including the CARICOM Agriculture Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA);
- Strengthening of research and development capacity within the Community;
- Developing a Regional Agriculture Market Information System;
- Maintaining a reliable information platform to facilitate monitoring and evaluation of progress and outstanding needs in the sector;
- Developing appropriate policies and incentives to encourage a stronger agriculture private sector;
- Encouraging the youth to become more engaged in the sector; and
- Addressing the inadequacy of transportation to better enable the export of agriculture products.

Taken as a whole, these priority actions provide the necessary conditions for further private sector growth and development.

Mr. Chairman, most, if not all of these issues will be discussed here in Montego Bay during this Week of Agriculture and Rural Life of the Americas. This Private Sector Dialogue which is taking place today is therefore very timely. It will be informed by the CARICOM Consultation which took place just five months ago. It provides a forum for dialogue on the opportunities and constraints which you the private sector of the hemisphere are faced with. And it will inform the discussions which will take place at the Fifth Hemispheric Ministerial Meeting later this week.

In your discussions, you may want to consider how best to improve collaboration and coordination among agriculture stakeholders. Can the private sector of the hemisphere better organize itself to define strategic priorities of the sector, and advocate for these priorities as a coordinated voice. Is there a need to make this Dialogue a regular feature of Hemispheric Ministerial Meetings.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you well in your deliberations and look forward to the recommendations which you will put forward to the Ministers.

I thank you.