

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE IN THE CARIBBEAN

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Formal Greetings

Let me start with a disclosure. I regard St. Vincent and the Grenadines as one of my many homes. Since the 1970s, I have journeyed to these islands to be in the company of friends and to satisfy my fascination with the Caribbean Sea, of which nature's way deprives me in my native home. My most recent visit to St. Vincent in March 2002, however, was for a different purpose. The objective was to research the crisis that had engulfed St. Vincent, and that had culminated in the Grand Beach Accord, national elections, and a change of government. My research findings form part of a larger study on 'Civil Society, Governance, and Conflict Resolution' that appears as a chapter in a book that the University of the West Indies will publish later this year. This evening I will reflect on some of the issues in my study. I will also address additional aspects of governance in my longstanding quest to provide insights that I hope will not only add to the increasing body of knowledge on governance in the region, but that will also be deemed worthy of public policy considerations.

But before I embark on my presentation, I would like to express my gratitude to the many Vincentians who, during my visit last year, afforded me interviews and were generous with their time. They include the Prime Minister, the Honourable Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, the Opposition Leader, the Honourable Arnhim Eustace, the

former Prime Minister, the Rt. Honourable Sir James Mitchell, the Resident Tutor of the University of the West Indies Centre for Continuing Education, Dr. Adrian Fraser, representatives of civil society organisations and the business community, and numerous individuals. I need not dilate on the standard disclaimer that none of the Vincentians that shared with me their perspectives on political, economic, and social developments in the country is responsible for the conclusions that I reached in my study.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Edwin Carrington, Secretary General of the Caribbean Community Secretariat, for bestowing on me the honour of delivering this fourth lecture in the Distinguished Lecture Series that celebrates the thirtieth anniversary of CARICOM and to speak on ‘Democracy and Governance in the Caribbean’. Although I lay claim to a varied professional career, as a diplomat and an academic, I take this invitation as a tribute to the academicians who have, throughout the thirty years of CARICOM and even earlier, made a major contribution to the understanding of regional integration and to those of them who also practised it.

Thirty years are a blink in the sweep of the history of human endeavours. But they constitute a relatively long period in the history of regional economic integration. CARICOM, and its forerunner, the Caribbean Free Trade Agreement, belong to the

first wave of integration that began in Europe after the Second World War. In the early 1960s, the Commonwealth Caribbean and Latin American countries led the way, among developing and the emergent industrialised countries, in establishing integration arrangements designed to expand their development opportunities.

CARICOM came into existence at the onset of a pessimistic outlook for the future prospects for integration worldwide. Inconsistencies between federalist and functionalist expectations about the ascendancy of supra-national organisations and the heavily statist orientation of most regional arrangements were so pronounced that integration theory was proclaimed 'obsolete' as a means of understanding European integration. The East African Economic Community, the most comprehensive and advanced integration arrangement in Africa at the time, became defunct following disputes about the distribution of the benefits of integration.

There were occasions when, in CARICOM, the adequacy of the mechanism for the equitable distribution of benefits became an issue or threatened to be one, as it still does. But no CARICOM member has taken its leave of the organisation. Instead, CARICOM expanded its membership on two occasions. Several countries with which CARICOM countries interact in regional arrangements, including the

Association of Caribbean States, have also expressed an interest in membership of CARICOM.

In terms of its external relations, CARICOM provided leadership to the formation of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of Countries, the forging of the ACP countries' position in their negotiation of the first Lome Convention with the European Community, and the conduct of the actual ACP-EU negotiations in the 1970s.

While membership of CARICOM is attractive to several countries, CARICOM itself has experienced moments of self-doubt. In the 1970s, the movement was undermined by efforts to shore up national economies affected by the rigidities and deformities of a world economy organised along the North-South axis. Additionally, the movement suffered from ideological wrangling. For seven years CARICOM Heads of Government could not overcome their differences, which were as personal as they were economic and ideological, to meet and impart a much needed impetus to the integration movement. The loss of enthusiasm for the movement was particularly marked in the countries that now comprise the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, which have always contended that benefits to the movement flow disproportionately in favour of the more developed countries of the region.

When the CARICOM Heads eventually met in 1982 to forestall a major breakdown in relations and with the hope of injecting new momentum into the movement, the proceedings threatened to be bedevilled by the ideological controversy. At the meeting, the CARICOM leaders decided to resolve their differences, or more accurately, place them aside. They pledged to work for the furtherance of regional integration and to not allow ideological pluralism to inhibit the process. Nonetheless, dissension resurfaced around the United States' invasion of Grenada before it gave way to efforts aimed at improving intra-regional relations.

Self-doubt emerged again later in the 1980s. A growing erosion of popular confidence in the movement was discernible, as was a renewed loss of enthusiasm among states for it. In the Declaration of Grand Anse in 1989, CARICOM leaders established the West Indian Commission and mandated it to undertake a pathological examination of the integration movement and to propose remedies for their consideration.

The West Indian Commission saluted the Caribbean for its democratic practices. It indicated that the Caribbean enjoys “a rare degree of democracy and freedom” but that “we must keep strictly in place what is one of the strengths, indeed one of the most attractive human features, of our Community”. These strengths are the

openness of the societies, and the practise of democracy based on the rule of law and the protection of human rights. The Commission urged that “[w]e must not risk losing any part of that lest the very essence of what we are is diluted”.

Nevertheless, the Commission did not fail to make several references to the threat to good governance in the Caribbean. The report stated that “[i]n the West Indies today there is considerable disquiet that the threats to good governance are increasing fast”, and it referred to the situation as “a warning signal that can not be ignored”. The report outlined some of the concerns indicating that “no country escapes some indictment” and that “[t]he disquiet is general enough to sound an alarm”.

The Commission found that there was tension between economic distress and democratic governance, which it contended could be the major destabilising factor in the Caribbean region. It also expressed concern that the incidence of drug trafficking and drug abuse was a menace that had implications for governance itself at the hands of the drug barons -the ‘dons’ of the modern Caribbean. Since the Commission’s dire warnings, the nefarious groups, powerful enough to challenge the authority of governments in the region, are increasingly subverting several of the institutions, values, and the fabric of society that uphold the democratic process. There is also a rising crime wave that threatens to engulf the

region. The illicit drug trafficking, and the money laundering that accompanies it, are linked to the escalating rate of crime on which, also, the return of deportees and the availability of guns on the streets have an impact. The undermining of the progress in governance, in civil and political life, no less that the economic and social life has developed beyond the threat that the Commission described.

In response to these challenges, the Caribbean countries have initiated the implementation of several decisions designed to strengthen the national capacity and to achieve greater regional cooperation. Perhaps the most important of these initiatives was the formulation of a Regional Demand Reduction Strategy to reduce the impact of, and demand for, drugs at the national and regional levels. Caribbean action also included the establishment of National Drug Commissions, National Joint Headquarters to coordinate activities of law enforcement agencies in all member states, and Financial Investigation Units. The countries further enacted legislation making trafficking in migrants a criminal offence. They also subscribed to two hemispheric conventions, the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption and the Inter-American Convention Against Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and other Related Materials. CARICOM has also agreed on mechanisms for the effective sharing of information and intelligence; and for a rapid response mechanism using the Regional Security System as a core.

Another threat to governance in the region are international interdiction arrangements. The United States Ship-rider Agreement, which that country submitted to every Caribbean country in 1996, was illustrative of the threat. The Agreement gave the United States narcotics agents the power to chase and intercept aircrafts or ships, suspected of being engaged in drug trafficking, deep into Caribbean airspace or territorial waters, without the prior approval of the Caribbean countries. It has been suggested that a major contributory factor to the United States method for dealing with the Caribbean was its concern with nefarious developments in the region. These developments were identified as the presence of agents catering to international organized crimes, money-laundering, the citizenship for sale programmes to investors in a number of countries, the embrace of suspect investors in off shore banking and Internet gambling, and the association of governments in these activities as willing partners and not just weak actors.

Barbados and Jamaica considered the provisions of the Ship-Rider agreement and the highhanded manner in which the United States attempted to introduce the Agreement to be insufficiently respectful of their respective constitutions and laws. They took the view that the threat that drug traffickers posed to their countries' sovereignty was no excuse for a similar threat from other sources.

In 1998, CARICOM countries were rudely reminded of the threat to their national capacity to act in their national interests. Based on its report on Harmful Tax Competition, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), blacklisted as non-cooperative tax havens, fifteen Caribbean offshore financial jurisdictions. The Caribbean jurisdictions, none of which belong to the organization, stated that the grouping initiative was inconsistent with international practice of multilateral diplomacy. Their opposition to the OECD arbitrary actions paid dividends as the Organization adopted the position that talking and listening to small developing economies rather than seeking to dictate to them could improve the process.

CARICOM countries measure their democratic credentials primarily in terms of regular, competitive elections. But elections are not simply a contest over visions, policies, programmes, and an opportunity to improve the well being of the citizens. They are fierce struggles for access to, and control of limited public resources and their allocation. Democracy requires these social struggles to be fought through campaigns, the ballot box, and in legislatures and other political institutions that essentially arbitrate among contending interests and beliefs. Sometimes, the social fabric of a society is weak, its core values are deeply disputed, and civic unity tears from the strain of competitive elections.

In at least two Caribbean countries, Guyana and Jamaica, violence erupts or intensifies around election events. As evidenced in St. Kitts and Nevis, the twin island state where economic and social differentials exist between the constituent territories, democracy is also about social struggles over the distribution of political power, representation, and rights.

In those Caribbean societies where the size of the electorate is relatively small, election outcomes pose a challenge to governance, which is exacerbated by the ‘first-past-the-post’ or ‘winner-takes-all’ system. Stress on the democratic institution often develops when a party sweeps the parliamentary seats and the government is without a formal opposition as was the case in St. Vincent and Grenada following the elections in 1989 and 1999 respectively.

Alternatively, a victory at the polls that has been narrowly achieved by one seat, denies the government a strong mandate and undermines its claims to legitimacy. This situation occurred in St. Lucia in 1987 and led the victorious party, in search of a stronger mandate, to ask for new elections that repeated the outcome. A crisis of governance can also be engendered when a political party wins the majority of the popular votes but not the majority of seats, especially if it refuses to accept the results and calls for fresh elections, as was the case in St. Vincent in 1998. The termination of the life of a government ahead of the constitutional date of

elections, whether as an outcome of extreme political pressure or intervention by a regional body, emphasises the fragility of the democratic arrangements and the conflicts that they induce. Such was the case that occurred in Guyana in 1998, in Suriname in 1999, and St. Vincent in 2001. Sometimes, the polarisation that the democratic practice creates or exacerbates leads to an inefficient and immobilised government, hindered performance, and prolonged and institutionalised conflict among contending social groups. In Caribbean countries with weak political and social institutions and bureaucratic incapacity, democracy sometimes falter because one political party interprets electoral irregularities as politically biased. A failure to conduct elections efficiently and impartially can result in violence and a conclusion among citizens that ‘conflict- inducing’ elections are an inadequate way of promoting their involvement in government. The incidence of alienation, apathy, withdrawal, and disdain for institution of governance often increases.

Although political discord is not pronounced or does not result in violence in every CARICOM country, it intertwines with economic and social disparities, and the prospects for economic development in all of them. Citing St. Vincent, Suriname, and Jamaica, the Prime Minister of Barbados noted in 2000 that political unrest and threats of unrest occur in different forms and with different incidence, but that they are always of sufficient severity to absorb enough energy to put the development of these countries on pause.

The explosive aspects of the democratisation process surface most prominently in the three multi-ethnic societies: Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad. In these countries where ethnic groups predominate in different areas, urban and rural, coastal and hinterland, unequal opportunities prevail, giving rise to differential economic fortunes. Furthermore, despite a large degree of cultural homogeneity in Guyana and Trinidad, and to a lesser extent in Suriname, political and cultural aspirations for ascendancy and perceptions of domination have fed divisive tendencies.

Conflicts fuelled by racial and ethnic tensions and economic disparities often leave perceived losers bitter and alienated, including citizens on both sides of the major ethnic divide, and those other racial groups caught in the middle of the ethnic insecurities. Sooner or later, neither side in the conflict situation has a sense that a 'win-win' solution is possible, or even desirable, so that the goal becomes 'winner-takes-all'. In this environment, any compromise or altered position is seen as weakness, not as part of the negotiating process.

There are no easy solutions. Racially divisive societies inevitably grow slowly because of preoccupation with social justice and performing the balancing act often take precedence over economic efficiency. Consensus over societal goals becomes an even more pressing need because acceptance of direction and

distributional implications cannot be readily achieved as in a more homogeneous society. Where poverty and ethnicity are correlated, poverty reduction strategies should be pursued based on statistical identification of the poor and targeting state resources to those in need of them for sustainability and growth.

Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad are not simply southern cone countries with structural similarities. Since the major political parties in each of these countries are ethnically based, the contribution of an ethnic group in the diasporic community of one of these countries to the election campaign of the political party that draws its primordial support from the same ethnic group in another one of these countries is an act of kindred solidarity that illustrates the depth and breadth of ethnic politics in the sub region. Additionally, the active territorial dispute between Guyana and Suriname compounds the relationships in the southern cone. As the integration process deepens, it is not unlikely that other countries will be affected by the territorial dispute. It is not unnecessary for CARICOM to strengthen its focus on the sub-region.

The notion that conflict is dysfunctional constitutes a partial view. The absence of conflict does not necessarily signify accord. It may denote the ocean of separateness and limited opportunity for contact. Conflict therefore presupposes interaction. Additionally, as trade unions will attest, conflict is positive and

transformative if it results in enlarging the scope for agreement and mutual respect for differences. But while a non-governmental organisation or a civil society group may contribute to change that is salutary, it is possible for the organisation to emerge from the conflict co-opted or more often bruised and wounded to the point where demobilisation becomes an option for it to exercise.

Whether democracy is conflict-inducing or otherwise depends on important choices over the form of democracy and the processes of democratic decision-making. A critical opportunity is the augmentation of competitive democracy with collaborative decision-making. Both as a concept and a phenomenon, collaborative democracy places a premium on inclusion, dialogue, and consensus decision-making. Social choices are made through participation and problem solving. Enhanced participation at myriad levels of society, as a complement to electoral competition, is key to realising a more advanced form of democracy that more consistently facilitates conflict resolution and social peace.

Policy makers and citizens in the Caribbean are turning to new forms of collaborative democratic governance as a supplement to, or sometimes a substitute for, traditional, adversarial decision-making. For example, Barbados has concluded a Protocol for Agreement on Social Policies among the private sector, the trade unions, and the state, which has placed Barbados in the vanguard of the

adoption of additional forms of participatory governance. In St. Vincent, Prime Minister Gonsalves, inspired by the Barbados modality, commenced discussions with the social partners while in the political Opposition, and he has continued to do so. The Jamaican government has regular meetings with non-governmental organisations and the Prime Minister has initiated discussions with the Opposition leader since the last election in October 2002.

In the other countries the inclusive approach is more limited. Barbados has recommended to Guyana that it formulate a social contract that would be subscribed to by every class and creed, to work to make Guyana succeed.

A political institution that seldom receives attention in efforts to improve democratic practice and the political process are political parties. Yet, from their appearance on the political scene as the institutional embodiment and harbinger of organised nationalist and mass politics, they have been an important and necessary component of stable democratic governance. Political parties provide the “supply side” of politics. They help turn citizen interests and demands into policies and laws. They are the reservoir from which the national political leaders of the executive and parliamentary branches of government are predominantly drawn. But their *modus operandi* is predicated on an adversarial mode, intolerance, and little accommodation of political rivals. This outlook induces pressure on them to

keep their ranks closed and to develop structures that much of the public does not regard as models of democratic decision-making, accountability, and transparency. When the opportunities arise, leaders of political parties and other political activists are more likely to take the party culture of decision-making into the inner sanctums of government than to leave it outside. Another consideration is the tendency for political parties, reeling from defeat at the polls, to suffer from a paucity of talent and funds, as recriminations, departures, moderation of enthusiasm, and contraction of sources of financial support take their toll. The conventional notions of the way in which the consolidation and improvement of democratic practices are approached are too narrowly conceived and limited in their institutional reach. Capacity building of political parties is as much in the interest of national governance as are the institutional strengthening of the public service, legislatures, non-governmental organisations, and community-based organisations.

In almost every CARICOM country, the process of constitutional review is underway and has received much impetus from the Regional Conference on Constitutional Reform in 2002, which CARICOM co-sponsored with other regional and international agencies. An underlying question that is being addressed in these reviews is whether inclusiveness and effective participation in governance can effectively take place in the context of the Westminster

parliamentary system. As practised in the Caribbean, this system emphasises division, exclusion, and executive ascendancy. The answer to this question provides CARICOM countries with additional forms of collaborative democracy, and with an opportunity to embrace and entrench them in their new constitutions.

The Westminster parliamentary system is also predicated on the existence of a professional public service that is characterised by political neutrality. Writers on the transfer of the British Cabinet culture to the post-colonial societies offered several advice to them. One is that the civil servant must feel broadly in sympathy with his ministers while prepared to serve loyally any political party. Another is that the personal factor matters in the actual relationships between the official and one particular minister or administration but it must not be so strong or single-tracked to render difficult equally fruitful personal relations with subsequent ministers. A third advice was that neutrality was dependent upon the attitude not only of the public servant but also the political directorate; pressure from the latter is as dangerous as importunity from the former. In small societies of the Caribbean where personal relationships are intense and pervasive; where support of, and loyalty to political parties are often judged by the public to be ascriptive; where the lines that separate the multiple societal roles that individuals perform are thin and unclear; and where pressures to succeed in government breed impatience with traditions and rules, the realism and feasibility of a depersonalised, disembodied

loyalty are placed in doubt. The future of a professional service must be a matter for consideration in the constitutional reviews.

CARICOM has traditionally stood aloof from the internal affairs of the member states. Its reluctance to intervene derived from several considerations. The first was CARICOM's political conception of supra-national governance. CARICOM's integrationist concept had been influenced greatly by the ill-fated attempt to establish a political federation in the 1950s. The Community founding fathers had learnt that any conscious derogation of national sovereignty was to be avoided.

Among the consequences of the Community's efforts to establish a balance between sovereignty and integration were reliance on the mechanisms of unanimity and consensus to reach decisions, and the desire to keep formal community institutions to a minimum. This strategy of decision making resulted in a protracted process of implementation of decisions, which continues today. On many occasions, before the implementation of a decision is completed the circumstances surrounding the decision are likely to have changed. Nonetheless, the dominant view is that delays in the implementation of an agreed program is a small price to pay for the preservation of each member's capacity to balance Community interests against its own perceptions of its national interests.

From a regional perspective, this balancing act militated against the performance of the purely economic integration or common market aspect of CARICOM. For, as William Demas, the doyen of Caribbean integration, noted, the Community “functioned with no Organs or Institutions with supranational powers and with no sanctions either on members states or legal or natural persons for not implementing the Treaty of Chaguaramas or decisions of the Community’s Organs or Institutions”.

The second consideration that informed CARICOM’s reluctance to involve itself in the domestic affairs of its constituent members reflected the universally held position during the Cold War that issues, such as the respect for human rights and the practice of a democratic culture, were deemed to rest within the jurisdictional ambit of individual states and to be of little legitimate concern of the international or regional community. The third consideration had a hemispheric dimension. CARICOM’s member states subscribed to the principles of ideological pluralism espoused by the Organisation of American States’ 1979 resolution on this issue within the region. This commitment obliged CARICOM states to respect their differing political and economic persuasions, including the methods of achieving and maintaining power.

One result of these considerations was the reaction of many Caribbean leaders to Barbados' announcement, on the eve of the resuscitated meeting in 1982, to seek to amend the principles of human rights and parliamentary democracy in the Treaty of Chaguaramas. Barbados' announcement was interpreted to be aimed at Grenada, whose government had not kept its promise to hold elections, made after its leaders had staged a *coup d'état* in 1979. Although many countries shared or empathised with Barbados' concern, the announcement, in the end, did not resonate.

The reluctance to intervene in the domestic affairs of member states also helps to explain CARICOM's decision to be generally unresponsive to allegations of electoral irregularities in Guyana during the 1970s and 1980s. Similarly, CARICOM relied on informal discussions as its preferred method of conferring with Guyana's leaders on several occasions. Prominent among these was the 1986 meeting in Mustique between a representative group of Heads of Government, notably Prime Minister Mitchell of St. Vincent and Prime Minister Eugenia Charles of Dominica, and the newly elected President Desmond Hoyte of Guyana. The interlocutory role that Prime Minister Mitchell performed between President Cheddi Jagan and Mr. Hoyte following the change of government in 1992 was also illustrative of the informal approach.

Critical to the effectiveness of the informal discussions were the inter-personal relationships that were facilitated by the longevity in government of many of the founding leaders of nationalist movements. These inter-personal relationships were also grounded in the collegial ties forged in British universities, in the case of the older generation of leaders, and in the University of the West Indies, in the case of the younger generation.

The changes in the global polity following the end of the Cold War and the related emergence of a greater homogeneity of political thought and action among the CARICOM member states yielded several implications for the region. A notable result is the reduction of the tensions between the principles of non-intervention and the universalism of good governance to the point where sovereignty itself is considered to be safeguarded when it is exercised in an international and a regional environment of inclusiveness. This is the context in which a number of initiatives that CARICOM has undertaken and several measures it has adopted to promote good governance should be viewed. An added context is CARICOM's establishment of a Single Market and Economy that is under way. The deepening of the integration process increases the need for formal Community institutions and arrangements and the region's stake in national governance. Mindful of this need, the Heads of Government in their Consensus of Chaguaramas in 1999, created the

Justice and Governance portfolio as part of the enlargement of CARICOM's quasi-cabinet.

It is significant, however, that the fortunes of supra-national structures of governance, or structures of unity, as the West Indian Commission called them, have varied. Those that promote functional co-operation and common services, such as the Assembly of Caribbean Community of Parliamentarians, the Youth Parliament, the CARICOM Task Force on Crime and Security, and the Pan Caribbean Partnerships against HIV/AIDS, have been widely embraced and have performed well.

On the other hand, the introduction of those structures that reach to the heart of economic integration or provide regional oversight has encountered difficulties. Despite close consultations with general and legal interest groups on the role of Caribbean Court of Justice that the West Indian Commission recommended, and that is essential to the functioning of the Single Market and Economy, the path towards its establishment has been anything but smooth.

Another West Indian Commission recommendation, the establishment of a Caribbean Commission, was controversial in many respects. The controversial aspects included: (i) constituting the Caribbean Commission as an enforcement

mechanism to effectively overcome the problem of implementation of CARICOM decisions; (ii) reliance on the political powers and stature of the commissioners to secure co-operation at the national level; (iii) denial of the CARICOM Secretariat of executive powers; and (iv) financial autonomy of the Commission. As the Prime Minister of Trinidad noted, the proposed Commission served as a lightning rod for anxiety and opposition as some Heads interpreted the proposal as an inroad into their control and authority. This apprehension was reflected in the Heads of Government's decision to reject the recommendation and to instead opt for a Bureau of Heads, comprised of rotating members.

Another structure of unity that was problematic was the Charter of Civil Society for the Caribbean that the West Indian Commission proposed as an additional compass in the promotion of democracy within the region. The West Indian Commission accorded civil society, as a phenomenon, considerable prominence in its report. But the concept lacks clarity and analytical rigor and is highly contestable. In addition to private, voluntary, and largely self-supporting organisations functioning in the public sphere, civil society frequently embraces the scholarly community, many of whose members are associated with public or government institutions. Civil society also counts economic groups among its vast array of organisations. This addition reinforces the perception that politics and economics provide an enabling environment for each other. The question that

arises is whether this close, almost umbilical relationship, means that the definition of civil society encompasses the market as well, or whether the market constitutes a separate, 'private' sphere in which civil society is a stakeholder.

There is greater certainty about identifying civil society with political action. Yet, political thinkers have distinguished 'civil' society from 'political' society. The boundary becomes an issue when civil society moves beyond arraigining itself against the abuse of state power and engages in the pursuit, acquisition, and exercise of that power. This ambiguity creates difficulty for civil society organisations in responding to their critics' claims that they are justified in labelling them 'political' rather than 'civil', especially if they coalesce with political parties in pursuit of their goals.

Beyond such definitional concerns, there is an ambivalent relationship between civil society and democratic government. There is a negative or hostile perspective that emphasises the tenuous nature of civil society, even as it exercises a restraining influence on state power. The ground on which the edifice of civil society is constructed or repaired on an ongoing basis is seen as capable of shifting at any given moment, thereby returning the polity to its uncivil and disfigured conditions. It has been suggested that civil society needs the protection of an

institutionalised order to be able to avoid the relapse of, or more positively to safeguard, civil society's freedom to act.

The other perspective is more benign. It focuses on the state, which it sees as being in need of civil society in order to achieve its objectives. In this way, civil society has come to play an even more critical role in determining how economies and societies work, the nature of transaction costs, and the feasibility of engaging in individual and group action. This emphasis on the participatory approach is particularly pertinent in the case of women whose traditional participation in decision making is yet to be commensurate with their involvement in the management of households and the organization of myriad of voluntary socio-economic groups.

The spread of democratic values does not account entirely for this more inclusive approach to governance. Budgetary considerations also play a part. Constrained by lower revenues consequent upon the liberalization of the economies, governments are forced to be innovative and to rely increasingly on the contribution of communities and non-governmental organizations to construct small infrastructural facilities and to maintain social amenities, including schools and health centres. The interaction provides legitimacy to both the state and civil

society and fosters the habit of “communicative discourse”, openness to one another’s views, and mutual tolerance.

An outgrowth of this positive relationship between civil society and the state is a third and overarching perspective that establishes a nexus among civil society, the market, and the state. It assumes, at times implicitly and at others explicitly, that civil society, private enterprise, and democracy constitute a package or a triad that could provide the watershed to a country’s evolution. The assumption is based on the view that authoritarian rule has led to steady economic decline, that democracy, including a vibrant civil society, is a pre-requisite for sustained economic development, and that at a minimum, democratic transaction and economic liberalisation are correlates.

The West Indian Commission seemed to be guided by the second and third perspectives in proposing the establishment of the Charter of Civil Society. In a sense, the Commission had recommended that the Community become the standard setter of democratic norms. The CARICOM Heads formulated and adopted the Charter in 1998. The preamble expresses the determination to “enhance public confidence in governance”, while one of the articles contemplates the participation of the people in the democratic process of establishing effective systems of on-going consultations by the government with them.

But the provisions were the outcome of countless concessions and compromises. While there were governments that supported the West Indian Commission's recommendation of the Charter, there were others who had reservations about the necessity for such a document. They noted that a substantial number of the principles to be reflected in the Charter were already enshrined in national constitutions and in international treaties and other agreements to which CARICOM states or their governments were parties. The opponents therefore wished to avoid producing a Charter repetitious of existing instruments. In order to reach consensus, the governments settled for a minimalist Charter that lacked sufficient specificity. Its provisions were not binding on the governments, and did not address the issue of sanctions in the event of default.

The Charter therefore did not satisfy the civil society organisations, some of which considered it vague and an exercise in avoidance. The criticism has persisted and has been accompanied by suggestions to revisit the Charter.

The reservations by some governments were susceptible to being interpreted as excuses since an adversarial mode of operations and ambivalence has traditionally characterised the relationship between the governments and non-governmental organisations. In terms of the ambivalence, governments have a spectrum of orientation towards non-governmental organisations. In relation to the

development process, they view them as social partners when the need arises for governments to build coalitions and obtain political support from influential groups, or when consultations with civil society are a condition stipulated by international donors, all of whom have elevated civil society, both as a concept and a phenomenon, into an organising principle. At the other end of the spectrum, the governments also view non-governmental organisations as unrepresentative competitors for leadership and influence that are to be kept under close scrutiny, and as havens for, and allies of, opposition forces that are undeserving of their tolerance.

In turn, a similar dual perspective informs civil society's orientation towards the governments. One aspect of it asserts that too close a relationship between governments and non-governmental organisations would compromise the ability of the latter to organise and articulate various interests in their societies. Through this prism, non-governmental organisations offer criticisms of them by governments as proof of their independence, which they generally consider essential to the effective performance of their role and the enhancement of the democratic environment.

The other component of the perspective emphasises the collaborative relationship between government and civil society as also being in the interest of the

democratic process. This outlook is appealing especially in the context of the clamour by various groups for a greater voice in decisions that will affect their lives upon the establishment of a Single Market and Economy. Within the civil society organisations, the decision of CARICOM, in its Consensus of Chaguaramas, to consult civil society seemed to be a logical development.

A mutual wariness, however, surrounded the preparatory process for those consultations. The civil society organisations prepared for the dialogue mindful of their experiences with CARICOM Heads. They recalled that the promise made at the Regional Economic Conference in 1991 to maintain a similar dialogue had remained unfulfilled. Another concern was, that, notwithstanding the provisions of the Charter, the governments were only grudgingly following through on their stated position of consultation with civil society at the regional level. Furthermore, little had been done in terms of monitoring and follow-up on ensuring that the commitments in the Charter were being fulfilled. The civil society organisations also claimed that interaction among the social partners was limited at the national level, a situation that provided little encouragement to them. On the other hand, it was recognised that the collaborative process between civil society and governments was made difficult because of questions, mostly raised by governments, on the representative nature of some of the groups purporting to represent civil society.

The meeting, which eventually occurred in 2002, was therefore only a modest attempt to explore the possibilities of improving governmental consultations with civil society. The Heads of Government agreed to a series of measures that included the institutionalisation of the consultation process, greater involvement of civil society in appropriate decision-making organs of the Community, and the establishment of a Task Force to develop a comprehensive regional strategic framework for carrying forward the main recommendations of the conference. The decisions did not necessarily overcome governmental reluctance about the policy or the pace of developing relations with civil society. Indeed, they reflected little more than the willingness of governments to take into account the views of civil society in the formulation of policies. Nonetheless, the decisions constitute a progression that began with the West Indian Commission's ideas for new modalities of governance that were themselves the product of extensive consultations with a cross section of West Indian society, both in the region and in the diaspora.

This reference to the diaspora has received much of its relevance from the advent of the electronic media. In expeditiously exposing both state and non-state actors within the region to the currents of opinion that emanate from the immigrant communities this relatively new and rapidly growing form of communication renders those communities part of the regional and national neighbourhood. This

development suggests that there is the need to refine the definition of civil society in terms of its spatial dimension, and to assess the impact of the phenomenon of an emerging ‘virtual’ civil society on the strength and vitality of civil society.

The analysis of CARICOM’s relationship with civil society is not intended to overlook its firmer and durable participatory approaches to governance. Each year the Conference meets with the labour movement, private sector, and non-governmental organisations through the Caribbean Congress of Labour, the Caribbean Association of Industry and Commerce, and the Caribbean Policy Development Centre. CARICOM also developed a working relationship with non-governmental organisations, including the provision of technical, organisational, and financial assistance to facilitate their participation in international conferences.

CARICOM has also extended its participatory approach to opposition political parties. The national delegations to the Assembly of Caribbean Community of Parliamentarians are drawn from both the government and opposition benches. In 1997, Dr. Kenneth Anthony, the newly elected Prime Minister of St. Lucia, and currently the Prime Minister with lead responsible for the Justice and Governance portfolio, urged that “the CARICOM Secretary General be empowered at the expense of the Community to brief, on an annual basis, all Opposition Leaders in a collective forum on matters pertaining to the Community”. He added, “the

inclusion of the opposition parties will make this process, though initially more contentious, ultimately more secure and reflective of the real dreams of every man and woman in our Caribbean”. In its Consensus of Chaugaramas, CARICOM adopted the proposal. It identified the political opposition as partners in the framework of the consultation in the integration process.

In addition to the structures of unity that the West Indian Commission proposed, CARICOM Heads established The Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery. The Negotiating Machinery found that its role as an empowered, inter-positioning authority, accountable to the Prime Ministerial Sub-Committee on External Negotiations, continually tested its relationship with other regional and national negotiating actors. These actors included the Caribbean Council of Trade and Economic Development, individual ministers, and senior public servants. The role of the Negotiating Machinery also had implications for the CARICOM Secretariat structure in the negotiating process.

The awkward relationship cannot be explained simply in terms of a contest for turf that veered towards the adversarial. Rather, other factors relate to the small size of most of the member states, the disparities of their economies, and the longstanding focus of the regional integration process on trade facilitation. When a matter is deemed politically important, the politicians become deeply engaged in order to

apprise themselves of developments. This is the reason Prime Ministers in many CARICOM states tend to retain the finance portfolio, and in some cases the foreign affairs portfolio. By the same token, ministers of trade and economic development will not readily overcome the tendency to be involved too early in the negotiation process, notwithstanding the contention of Sir Alister McIntyre, a former CARICOM Secretary General, that premature ministerial intervention could complicate the negotiation process. Nor would the ministers acquiesce readily to a preponderance or burgeoning role of an inter-positioning authority.

The downgrading of the status of the Negotiating Machinery, the modification of its structure, and the assertion of ministerial control over the negotiation processes in which the Negotiating Machinery participates, are related to these perceptions of the primacy of national interests. With much at stake in global and regional trade negotiations, as well as bilateral ones between CARICOM and other countries or groups of countries, ministers have developed a strong tendency to stay close to the fireplace and take care of the ember. This tendency is unlikely to be overcome in the absence of an effective regional mechanism to compensate losers in an integration process that is slowly shifting away from merely facilitating trade towards introducing the Single Market and Economy whose primary *raison d'être* will be the rationalising of the region's production resources in order to make them more internationally competitive. Stated differently, the reluctance to subsume

national interests in joint efforts in trade and economic relations is likely to persist, especially in countries whose potential for competing in international markets is limited, unless the equitable distribution of the gains from the Single Market and Economy are forthcoming or guaranteed.

CARICOM's show of a greater disposition to involve itself extended to the exercise of its mediating influence in political conflicts. CARICOM has mounted Electoral Observer Missions in its member states, including Haiti and Suriname. It also dispatched a Prime Ministerial Mission to St. Kitts and Nevis in 1998 in pursuit of a solution to the persistent problem of governance between St. Kitts and Nevis. Since 2001, CARICOM has also worked closely with the Organization of American States in a joint initiative on Haiti to accompany the country in its efforts to resolve its political and economic problems.

Prominent among CARICOM's pro-active approach was its intervention in Guyana and St Vincent. When periodic ethnic, social, and political unrest in Guyana escalated following the controversial outcome of the national elections in December 1997, CARICOM brokered an agreement, the Heardmanston Accord, between the leaders of the two major political parties, the People's Progressive Party/CIVIC and the People's National Congress, that diffused the situation at that time. In conjunction with the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States,

CARICOM also played a similar role in St. Vincent, where a strike by public service employees against the government had grown into a political impasse. CARICOM contributed to the Grand Beach Accord among the government, the opposition party, and civil society groups that ended the conflict. In each of these two cases, the curtailment of the government's life was the highlight of the agreement. Several Heads of Government expressed reservations about CARICOM's approach to the resolution of conflict and some of them decried any unconstitutional actions designed to remove a duly elected government from office.

CARICOM had raised a hornet's nest without its mediation efforts fully achieving their desired goals. CARICOM's intervention in Guyana, including the presence of a CARICOM Facilitator, has had no long-term effect on the perennial conflict. When in December 2001, the national election contest in Trinidad and Tobago between the ruling United National Congress and the People's National Movement resulted in a dead heat and in the possibility of a constitutional crisis, the rival leaders seemed agreed that CARICOM's mediating role or other forms of intervention was to be avoided because new elections were an aspect of its approach to conflict management and conflict resolution. The leaders of the two parties established a measured relationship with CARICOM leaders on a low key, informal mission to the country. Neither of the two party leaders was interested in

taking the risk of returning to the electorate when, for the United National Congress leader, the retention, and, for the People's National Movement leader, the acquisition of Prime Ministerial office was within their respective grasp.

The appreciation of CARICOM's intervention by the opposition parties in Guyana and St. Vincent and the criticism by governments that CARICOM went too far in brokering the termination of the life of two governments placed CARICOM on the horn of a dilemma. But the criticism should be measured against the violence that threatened St. Vincent and the likelihood of more extreme developments in Guyana. Once the national capacity to settle major problems through dialogue and consensus building is absent or limited, regional and extra-regional interventions for the search of solutions are likely to occur. At the same time, the interventions could prove to be counter-productive if they result in encouraging countries to develop a certain dependency on external actors to mediate local conflicts, rather than in motivating them to resolve these conflicts themselves. Like charity, enhancing regional governance should begin within the national home.

Consideration of the scope, character, pace, and future of regional governance has once more emerged as a major preoccupation of CARICOM Heads of Government. This is evident in their decision to address the phenomenon under the theme, 'Consultations on Options for Regional Governance for Caribbean

Regional Integration’ at their Inter-Sessional Meeting in February 2003. At the Forum there was general agreement that the pace of the integration movement is slow and that efforts to implement the Single Market and Economy are the barometer. There was, however, less agreement on the pace of acceleration. The difference of views is exemplified in the separate proposals that the University of the West Indies’ St. Augustine campus, and the Government of Barbados in conjunction with the University of the West Indies’ Cave Hill campus, prepared to facilitate the discussion. The St. Augustine study advised that CARICOM proceed with the implementation of the Single Market and Economy within one year. It also proposed that CARICOM apply the same immediacy to vesting the CARICOM Secretariat with the legal authority to enforce decisions that are in the public interest, thereby ensuring that these decisions are enforceable in the legal system of individual countries. Additionally, the study recommended that within the context of redesigning the Secretariat, a committee be established to decide on a new structure and mandate for the Secretariat within thirty days. The study also urged that CARICOM move swiftly to conclude a Custom Union Agreement with Central American countries.

The Barbados study revisited the idea of a Caribbean Commission, including its role, composition, and method of appointing the commissioners. It also proposed the addition of several bureaucratic layers, consisting of Permanent

Representatives to the Ministerial Councils, a Committee of Permanent Representatives, and the Office of Auditor General, a Committee of the Assembly of Caribbean Community of Parliamentarians, and a Private Sector Council. Conspicuously common to the two papers, however, was their return to many of the issues that the West Indian Commission had addressed twelve years earlier. The studies are a reminder that the Commission's report remains the holy writ on Caribbean integration.

The Heads of Government agreed to establish an Expert Group to undertake an examination of the proposals in the two studies, as well as those from other recent reports, including two reports relating to the establishment of the Single Market and Economy, and to make recommendations on the best way forward to perfect regional integration.

The Expert Group is being chaired by the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and also includes his counterparts in Antigua, Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad. The Expert Group will be expected to use a two-pronged approach. First, is the examination of measures for enhancing the existing institutional structures and mechanisms of CARICOM. The second prong is an examination of options for alternate forms of governance to deepen the integration process, as well as modalities for their

operationalisation, including the development of options for governance for political integration, for those who so desire.

This idea of political integration had emanated from two leaders. One was the Prime Minister of Trinidad who had taken the initiative to convene the Consultations on Options for Governance. The other Head of Government was the Prime Minister of St. Vincent, who took the opportunity of his inaugural lecture of this distinguished lecture series to articulate his views. While both Prime Ministers are longstanding advocates of political union at the sub-regional level, their leap to a maximalist approach to integration pressed itself on the attention of every country in the Community. But the leap, as anticipated, did not necessarily fire the imagination of all of them. The mixed reaction suggests that this is an idea whose time has yet to come in terms of the subscription of all the CARICOM member states to it.

This suggestion of a political union has raised a sceptical question about co-existence and compatibility. What is the prospect for turning the integration relationships across the Caribbean Sea into a political union, when these relationships are not adequately matched by the habit of joining hands across the political aisle nationally; when fractious relationships, muted or otherwise, in countries are identified and accepted, with resignation, as an element of Caribbean

political culture; when breaking and creaking fences are slow to mend; and when the existence of a social contract between governments and their social partners is not wide spread?

Despite the commendable democratic credentials of Caribbean countries, successor governments devote such a great deal of their time ‘settling the score’ and attempting to jettison indiscriminately past achievements that they do not take political liberalisation far enough. For its part, the leaders of the preceding government become embattled in their efforts to preserve their legacy. Furthermore, opposition parties are expected for the most part to retain their own approaches to public policy and their legitimate right to criticise government actions. But they often do not try as hard to define those areas of national interest where they and the government are not too far apart, and where, with additional effort on both sides, some common ground could be reached.

At the outset of my presentation, I referred to the significant contribution that the academic community has made to regional unity. The role that the University of the West Indies St. Augustine and Cave Hill campuses played in facilitating the Consultations on Options for Governance is among the most recent examples of the contribution of the universities to addressing issues relating to democracy and governance. In 2002, the Mona campus organised the Mona Academic Conference

on Governance whose proceedings constitute the book that Mona intends to publish before the end of the year. The Conference affirmed an emergent trend in the universities in the region, and the growing recognition by CARICOM countries and the donor community, of the invaluable role universities could play in the improvement and consolidation of democracy and governance in the region. Indeed, the Conference accorded with the views of the Prime Minister responsible for Justice and Governance that the universities should spawn ideas on governance from which public policy on the issue could be derived.

The University of Guyana is also making a contribution. In 2001, it established an internationally funded project on ‘Democratisation and Conflict Resolution in Guyana’, in partnership with Clark Atlanta University. I am privileged to serve as the director of the program. The University of Guyana has implemented several of the conflict resolution activities that the project promotes, including the development and delivery of a course in ‘Conflict Analysis and Conflict Resolution’. Plans are under way to modify the course syllabus to facilitate distance learning. Another activity is a series of workshops on conflict resolution that target civil society groups as participants. Conscious of the contribution of the Guyanese abroad to development and dialogue in Guyana, the University of Guyana has also held a ‘Guyana Diaspora Forum on Conflict Analysis and Conflict Resolution in Guyana’ in the United States. These program activities are

intended to impact positively on the efforts of the University of Guyana to strengthen capacity in democratisation, governance, public dialogue, conflict management, and sustainable participatory processes in Guyana.

The project is not only timely and relevant to Guyana but is also of great significance for other Caribbean countries, including Belize, a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society, whose experiences are a contrast to those in the three CARICOM southern cone, multi-ethnic societies.

The various efforts and activities on the three campuses of the University of the West Indies, and at the University of Guyana, conceivably constitute the nucleus of an inter-university Regional Centre for Democracy and Governance Studies, that should also embrace the University of Anton de Kom in Suriname, and the other University of the West Indies Centres. The Centre for Democracy and Governance Studies would increase the scope and opportunity for concerted attention to governance issues, and would point the way to the development of a matrix of analysis, policy recommendations, and action.

Prime Minister Gonsalves' inaugural lecture served as a reminder that the founding fathers of Caribbean nationalism conceived a region that was independent, that cherished its identity, and that was capable of projecting its dignity. For them,

integration meant more than matters that relate to trade, which, at times, have been the almost exclusive justification for CARICOM. The added focus on democracy and governance is not a matter of choice but one of necessity if the vision of the founding fathers is to stand a chance of being realised.