

OUR CARIBBEAN IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY:  
A Way Forward

by

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[Formal Greetings]

There is, in my view, an overwhelming consensus in our Caribbean on what the major challenges of our region are, on the possibilities and strengths of our nations individually and our Caribbean civilization collectively, on our limitations and weaknesses, and on the best way forward. This remarkable consensus is oft-times undermined by the vagaries of competitive politics and undue partisanship, personal vanities, interfering external forces with their own agendas at variance with ours, and an insufficiency of political virtue among some of our leaders and people—a political virtue defined in terms of individual and collective self-mastery.

Authoritative reports or studies by regional institutions, governments and experts of one kind or other are replete with an identification of the challenges, possibilities, limitations and prognoses. Much of all this is reflected in the election manifestos and public policies aggregated for a discriminating electorate. Serious Caribbean nationals in the diaspora contribute also, to this consensus. So, why are we at this Conference on the Caribbean in quest of a perfect 2020

vision and uplifting practical conclusions for efficacious implementation?

First, we in the Caribbean are possessed of a fascinating conundrum resident in the human condition which prompts us to a search for perfection in our Earthly City and at the same time acknowledges the restraint on achieving perfection anywhere save and except on the other side of Eternity. Accordingly, we gather at this Conference to do the best we can within the time-frame, here and, of our joint and several lives. We thus strive to deliver good governance and to do so excellently.

The aim to deliver good governance excellently has caused us to fashion a consensus which revolves around the following four main pillars:

- I. The vision of a further ennoblement of our Caribbean civilization and its national components in a way which provides for an appropriate historical reclamation, cultural authenticity, a commitment to tried and tested ennobling values rooted in our Caribbean experience, a mature dignity, a sense of self-mastery which asserts, not in theory but in practice, that we are no better than anyone else, but no-one is better than we are, and material upliftment and markedly enhanced opportunities for all the people.

- II. Broad acceptance of the central tenets of social democracy applied to the special circumstances of the Caribbean.
  
- III. The building of a modern, competitive, post-colonial economy which is at once national and regional. Each word of this formulation is pregnant with real meaning. Explicitly, the regional dimension involves a deepening and broadening of the integration process through the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), and beyond, including more tightly-drawn integration arrangements for the small nation-states of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).
  
- IV. The elaboration of sensible, practical policies and programmes centred on economic growth and sustainable development, economic diversification, human development, including most pivotally education, training, health, culture and poverty reduction; energy; fair trade; disaster preparedness and mitigation; the environment and climate change; information technology; managed migration and the Diaspora; air and sea transportation; the physical infrastructure, including housing; governance and democracy; fiscal consolidation; security for all; and a foreign policy which is independent, principled, nationalist and pragmatic and which is designed to enhance our region's capacity to address more capably our external environment in the interest of our people's own humanization.

This is a consensus not born in Washington nor made by any group of missionaries who descend itinerantly from this or that international financial institution. It is an organic, home-grown consensus fashioned from our own experiences, the grace of which has brought us well thus far and is destined to take us safely home, in accomplishment. A few issues thus arise upon which I want to comment.

First, this generation of post-colonial peoples and leaders are confident, though not complacent, in achieving successfully, and simultaneously, the transitional tasks inherent in the movement from a colonial to a post-colonial economy **and** the actual construction of a modern, competitive, post-colonial economy which is at once national and regional. This maturing voice, which once stood uncertain amidst the alien corn has now come into its own, for ourselves at home and abroad. The very modern globalization which has challenged us, has enabled us to find and speak in our own voice. In that sense, modern globalization has helped us to venture more assuredly beyond our seascape and landscape **and** also to come home decisively.

Secondly, and related to the preceding consideration, is the critical role prospectively of our Diaspora scattered hither and thither, including here in the USA. The Caribbean person is truly the first transnational figure who has emerged from the colonial peoples. Their achievements have been immense to their host countries and their homeland rocks to which they are inextricably bound. They have done their “Star Trek” on earth without any help whatsoever from

their nation-states. Their nation-states are playing catch-up. In every field of human endeavour the migrants can be found in the USA and elsewhere making their ordinary and towering contributions. Daily, too, the lyrics of Bob Marley and Rihanna “light fires” in, or place secure “umbrellas” over peoples all the world over. It is absolutely remarkable! More and more, the migrants from the Caribbean enter the chain of the international division of labour at a higher level than the pioneering forebears. Our region must capture for its full benefit in the post-colonial economy this many sided-resource of the Diaspora.

Thirdly, in the construction of the modern post-colonial economy in the Caribbean, we ought never to be defensive about the central role which the State has to play. In the Caribbean, the State has been a force for good and cannot retreat from economic management and regulation and, in certain critical areas and circumstances, from economic ownership in practical, non-ideological terms. To be sure, markets help allocate resources and deploy them sensibly. But our governments are required not only to strengthen markets, but to strengthen themselves in the people’s interest. Our region has been figuring our quite properly, at each stage of its development, the right mix of the government and the market without any preconceived ideological dictation from some who have made this a career preoccupation, from a distance.

Fourthly, our region needs friends everywhere in a mature partnership for prosperity and security. Immediately, our region has

reason to complain that the international financial institutions and developed countries have been less than true to their commitments on the financing for development, including those made at Monterrey, not quite five years ago. The case for sensible reforms in the international financial institutions to facilitate development and eradicate poverty, is unanswerably strong. Yet, the reforms have stalled and a “business –as- usual” ethos continues to envelop the citadels of the IFIs and their major subscribers. It is time for action here! An immediate start would be practical and substantial support for the CARICOM Regional Development Fund.

And finally, there is an over-riding need for all of us to recognize the very special circumstances and vulnerabilities of small developing states and economies, including island-based ones, such as those in the Caribbean. This recognition ought always to command the attention of policy-makers within the region and internationally. It is a consideration of critical importance, especially on matters of trade and development financing. The farmers and workers in the banana and sugar industries have been casualties of a most unfair bundle of trading arrangements under the beguiling objective of “trade liberalization”.

Urgent help is required here from the international community during this economic dislocation and transition. It is a matter of both poverty reduction and security.

This is not a case of special pleading. It is a rational case based on fairness, equity, reasonableness, and the self-interest of all who have a stake in the Caribbean and its development.

As I conclude, I urge this august assembled gathering to resolve today to act in ways to make a positive difference in the Caribbean, in a mature partnership with our region. We can do it if we really try!

Thank you.