

Departamento de América Latina y el Caribe

CARICOM

Communique Issued at the Conclusion of the Eighteenth Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

12-14 February 2007, Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Press release 48/2007

(14 February 2007)

The Eighteenth Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was held in Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, on 12-14 February 2007 under the Chairmanship of Dr. the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Chairman of the Conference of Heads of Government.

Other Heads of Government in attendance were: Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Hon. Baldwin Spencer; Prime Minister of Barbados, Rt. Hon. Owen Arthur; Prime Minister of Dominica, Hon. Roosevelt Skerrit; Prime Minister of Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique, Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell; President of Guyana, His Excellency Bharrat Jagdeo; Prime Minister of Haiti, Hon. Jacques Edouard Alexis; Prime Minister of Jamaica, Most Hon. Portia Simpson-Miller; Chief Minister of Montserrat, the Hon. Dr. Lowell Lewis; Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis, Hon. Dr. Denzil Douglas; Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, Rt. Hon. Sir John Compton; President of the Republic of Suriname, His Excellency Dr. Rinaldo R. Venetiaan, and the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Hon. Patrick Manning.

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas was represented by His Excellency A. Leonard Archer, Ambassador to the Caribbean Community. Belize was represented by Hon. Eamon Courtenay, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade.

The Associate Members were represented by, the Premier of Bermuda, Hon. Ewart Browne, and the Director of International Affairs of the British Virgin Islands, Ms. Lorna Smith.

OPENING SESSION

Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community, His Excellency Edwin Carrington welcomed Delegates to the Eighteenth Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government that was being held in a country that was "one of the unshakeable pillars of regional integration."

The Secretary-General expressed the hope that the determination and resilience of the original inhabitants of these islands would "characterise our efforts in building a Caribbean Community worthy of the highest aspirations of our people."

The Immediate Past Chairman of the Conference, the Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis, the Hon. Dr. Denzil Douglas in his statement reviewing the several issues which were the primary focus of the Region under his leadership, urged that initiatives to alleviate the poverty of the Haitian people move forward with even greater haste and focus, so that they might bear fruit for that country's people.

He stressed that it was important that all components of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy be fully implemented within the time frames that had been set. The Prime Minister expressed pleasure at the "tremendous work that has gone into the establishment of the Regional Development Fund and with the serious attempts made through this mechanism to address the special needs of the OECS countries."

The Prime Minister reminded the Community that its young people must be specifically prepared to become active and dynamic participants in all aspects of the integration process as the CSME is established.

Prime Minister Douglas, who holds the portfolio for Health in the Community's Quasi-Cabinet, urged the development of a "comprehensive regional strategic plan to respond to the chronic non-communicable diseases and the havoc they are wreaking on our Caribbean people."

The Chairman of Conference, Dr. the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, set an inspirational tone for the meeting with his address, during which he welcomed the Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, the Rt. Hon. Sir John Compton on his return to the Conference and thanked his predecessor, Dr. the Hon Kenny D. Anthony for his contribution to regionalism.

Prime Minister Gonsalves called on CARICOM to use the occasion of the 200th Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to pursue, in a coherent way, the legitimate demand for a full apology and reparations from the Europeans for African slavery, which he deemed "a dastardly act against humanity" as well as for the ignoble subjugation of indentured labourers from India, China, and Madeira.

"A genuine partnership between our Region and Europe demands, among other things, this wholesome righting of historic wrongs. The dignity of both the Caribbean and Europe justly summons this cleansing of the spirit and of the historical decks," he added.

With regard to the CSME, the Chairman set out the provisions of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas which spoke to disadvantaged countries, regions and sectors and alluded to the proposed Regional Development Agency as a body of seminal importance to the Member States of the OECS which, he noted, were all listed as disadvantaged or Less Developed Countries.

The Prime Minister urged the Community to do its best and be the best in the hosting of "the breathtaking cooperative initiative known as Cricket World Cup (CWC) 2007."

The Chairman asserted that, "In this Caribbean Community, at this Inter-Sessional Meeting, our leaders, in shaping our future in communion with our people, must strive always to glimpse morning before sunrise, to see the dawn even at the darkest hour."

SIGNINGS

His Excellency the President of Suriname and the Secretary-General of CARICOM signed the Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Suriname and the Caribbean Community Establishing the Seat and the Offices of the Competition Commission of the Caribbean Community in Suriname on 13 February 2007.

The Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the Competition Commission was signed by the Governments of Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Saint Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago on 12 February 2007 and by the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines on 14 February 2007.

The Protocol to the Treaty on Security Assistance on the Establishment of the CARICOM Operations, Planning and Coordinating Staff (COPACS) was signed by Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago on 14 February 2007

CARICOM SINGLE MARKET AND ECONOMY

The Conference adopted a paper entitled "Towards a Single Economy and a Single Development Vision", as the framework for the further elaboration of the Single Economy, with the understanding that refinements will have to be done with particular reference to the poverty alleviation dimension in time for final sign off at the regular Meeting of the Conference in July 2007. It was agreed that the Single Vision would be used as the basis for a comprehensive development plan.

Furthermore, the Conference agreed to amend the membership of the Prime Ministerial Sub-Committee on the CSME to include Prime Ministers with responsibility for the various productive sectors. The Conference also agreed that the requisite steps be taken to designate the Business Council as an Associate Institution of the Community.

With respect to the CARICOM Development Fund, the Conference agreed that donors' contributions would be welcomed. However, Member States would be required to honour their own contribution commitments in a timely manner to give effect to the July 2007 operationalisation of the Fund.

With respect to the Regional Development Agency which is required to attract investment, assist industries to become efficient and competitive, promote structural diversification and infrastructure development, the Conference mandated the Implementation Task Force to evaluate the possible framework options for the institution and make appropriate recommendations for consideration by the Conference at its Twenty-Eighth Regular Meeting in July in Barbados.

Free Movement

The Conference approved proposals for streamlining arrangements that will facilitate the free movement of artisans in the regional labour market. The system approved by the Heads of Government will allow for artisans to obtain credentials through the award of Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQ) based on occupational standards set by industry. It is expected that the CVQ will be in place by July 2007.

The Conference also agreed that the free movement of domestic and hospitality workers can be facilitated in a similar manner to the free movement of artisans and shall be considered after the CVQ Model is launched.

The Conference accepted the proposal of the Regional Task Force of Stakeholders, which includes labour, business and civil society as developed in March 2006, with respect to the implementation of full free movement of CARICOM Nationals by the end of 2009 according to an agreed schedule.

Developments Related to Agriculture

The Conference received the report of the Lead Head of Government for Agriculture, His Excellency Bharrat Jagdeo, President of Guyana whose presentation centred on the role of the sector within the framework of the CSME. The Conference noted the potential role of all the sectoral programmes, recognising, in particular, the unexploited capacity of the agricultural sector in all Member States.

The Conference reiterated the importance of Agriculture in the economic development of the Region in the context of the CSME and the significant role which the private sector must play in production integration.

The Conference agreed that a CARICOM Agricultural Donor Conference will be held in June 2007 in Trinidad and Tobago to mobilise resources for the sector.

In that context, the Conference recognised that the Jagdeo Initiative was designed and implemented to underpin the Regional Transformation Programme for Agriculture, which is intended to make the sector more market-oriented, internationally competitive and increase its contribution to the sustainable economic development of the Community.

The Conference agreed that the strategy going forward should be framed within a results-oriented management process with benchmarks and impact assessment built in. In this regard, the Conference agreed to the establishment of Focal Points at national Ministries of Agriculture and the implementation of a comprehensive structured mechanism for reporting and monitoring. In addition, the Conference stressed the importance of Member States taking into consideration the integration of national and regional initiatives in the sector.

Energy

The Conference considered the Draft CARICOM Energy Policy prepared by the Task Force on Energy and presented by the Lead Head of Government for Energy Matters, the Hon. Patrick Manning.

The Draft Energy Policy addressed a range of issues including: security of supply; development and diversification of energy sources and market; renewable energy; electricity sector; energy conservation and efficiency; energy investment; intra-community trade in energy; energy and the environment; enhancement of human and institutional capacity; and energy and poverty alleviation

The Conference recommended that the Draft CARICOM Energy Policy be considered at a Special COTED Meeting of Ministers responsible for Energy before further consideration at the Twenty-Eighth Regular Meeting of the Conference to be held in July in Barbados.

Regional Air and Maritime Transport

The Conference mandated the convening of an urgent Special Meeting of the Council on Trade and Economic Development (COTED) on Air and Maritime Transportation, to consider regional transportation issues including the elaboration of a Regional Transportation Policy and a vision for a regional airline. The Conference also agreed that Bermuda should be invited to participate in the Special Meeting.

In arriving at that position, the Conference received reports from the shareholder Governments on the long-term strategic plans of their national carriers and the implications of those plans for the Region. The Conference noted the statement by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago that Caribbean Airlines is now free of all encumbrances and is required to operate on a commercial basis. The Conference also noted the on-going restructuring exercise involving LIAT (1974) Ltd and Caribbean Star Airlines aimed at concluding a merger of the carriers before the end of the third quarter of 2007. The Conference also noted that the merged entity would operate on a commercial basis.

The Conference urged the Shareholder Governments of Caribbean Airlines, LIAT, Air Jamaica and Bahamas Air to encourage their respective airlines to pursue commercial alliances among themselves.

The Conference also urged the participation of the regional private sector in the elaboration of the maritime transport policy. The Conference noted the conclusion of a recent study on the transportation of agricultural and other products within the Community and the call for the introduction of a fast ferry inter-island service to address the transportation of passengers and cargo.

GOVERNANCE OF THE COMMUNITY

The Conference received a presentation by Professor Vaughan Lewis, Chairman of the Technical Working Group on Governance (TWG) and accepted the Report, as having fulfilled the Terms of Reference of the TWG.

The Conference congratulated the TWG for the excellent work it had done.

The Conference invited those countries which had a different model of Governance from that proposed in the Report to submit these models to the Secretary-General as early as possible.

Notwithstanding those forthcoming submissions, the Conference agreed that Member States should consider the policy issues and recommendations contained in the Report of the TWG and that wide-ranging consultations should be held with other stakeholders including the Parliamentary Opposition and Civil Society, before the submission of their positions to the Secretary-General.

The Conference also agreed to re-establish the Inter-Governmental Task Force, to work in collaboration with the Legal Affairs Committee and a Sub-Committee of the TWG towards the elaboration of a Draft Protocol, with a view to recommending the requisite amendments to the Revised Treaty.

The Conference further agreed that the process should be guided by the Lead Prime Minister for Justice and Governance, assisted by the Bureau of the Conference and the Secretariat, and that an Interim Report would be presented for the consideration of the Twenty-Eighth Meeting of the Conference in July 2007 in Barbados.

Security as the Fourth Pillar of the Community

The Conference has recognised Security as the fourth pillar of the Community, given its ever-increasing importance and its cross-cutting and fundamental nature. The Conference also agreed that steps should be taken to formalise this decision in the context of a revision of the Revised Treaty

CRICKET

Issues Related to the Staging of CWC 2007

An update on World Cup Cricket from the CEO/MD ICC/CWC 2007 revealed that less than 400 hours to the Opening Ceremony in Trelawny, Jamaica on 11 March 2007, emphasis is being placed on ensuring that stadia are completed and adequate hotel accommodation available to meet the requirements of the Host Venue Agreement with the ICC.

It was agreed that every effort must be made by all relevant stakeholders, including the Tourist Boards, hoteliers, customs and immigration officials, as well as our CARICOM citizens to make visitors' experience to the Region a memorable one.

The Meeting was also informed that the sale of tickets was proceeding quite well and urged CARICOM nationals to 'come out' in large numbers to support this once-in-a-lifetime event and, in particular, the West Indies Team.

The Conference also received an update from the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Sub-Committee of the Council of Ministers of National Security and Law Enforcement, the Deputy Prime Minister of Barbados, the Hon. Mia Mottley on the preparations for ensuring a safe and secure environment for the hosting of Cricket World Cup 2007.

In addition to arrangements for the deployment of regional and international law enforcement, public health and other resources and assets to complement capacity in host venue states, the Conference also agreed on the implementation of a Regional Communication Strategy to be supported by the CWC WI ICC Inc., and Crisis Management Protocols to be applied at the national and regional levels.

In the area of health, a Mass Gathering Surveillance System will be executed in all CARICOM Member States with support from the Government of Canada, the European Union, the Pan American Health Organisation and the World Health Organisation. Special support will also be provided to strengthen Port Health, Environmental, Food Safety and Vector Control facilities in the host venue States.

The Conference expressed satisfaction with the new intelligence-sharing initiatives introduced and agreed that these arrangements would become permanent beyond CWC 2007. The Conference also expressed satisfaction with the establishment of the Single Domestic Space which included the nine Host countries of CWC 2007 and Dominica.

Future of the West Indies Cricket

The Conference was pleased to receive a report on a strategic plan for West Indies cricket and proposals of the WICB for establishing a Cricket Development Academy and for sustainable funding.

The Conference also endorsed the decisions by the WICB which has established a Sub-Committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. Ken Boyea of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, to liaise with officials in each country to establish viable options for the effective uses of the stadia and other facilities that were developed for World Cup Cricket. This would include making provision for sports other than cricket to be included in the plans and giving consideration to adopting the Barbados model of a National Management Committee for stadium development.

HEALTH

The Conference recalled that the Report of the Caribbean Commission on Health and Development (CCHD) presented to the Twenty-Seventh Regular Meeting of the Conference in July 2006, highlighted the increasing levels of morbidity and mortality arising from the chronic non-communicable diseases and also the severe economic burden which these diseases were placing on Member States.

The Conference was seized of the need to consider the problem in detail and to arrive at public health policies to address the issues. In this context, the Conference agreed to the convening of a Regional Summit on the NCDs which would be preceded by national consultations.

The Conference agreed that the aims of the Summit would be to establish and agree on a regional approach to the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases and, in this regard, to evaluate the Caribbean situation within the global context.

The Conference also commended the Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP) on the progress which had been made towards achievement of universal access to HIV and AIDS prevention, care and treatment.

The Conference, noting the vital role of PANCAP, proposed that consideration be given to the establishment of other Pan Caribbean initiatives in other priority health areas identified in the Report of the Caribbean Commission on Health and Development.

HAITI

The Conference received a report from the Prime Minister of Haiti with respect to the situation in that Member State.

The Government of Haiti expressed its appreciation for the position adopted by the Caribbean Community during the transition period in Haiti and for the welcome received on its return to the Councils of the Community.

The Conference noted that the programme of cooperation agreed between Haiti and the CARICOM Multi-Disciplinary Technical Mission will facilitate Haiti's functioning within the Community. For its part, the Government of Haiti has established and made operational a unit within the Office of the Prime Minister which will facilitate this interface. It also reiterated its intention to facilitate the re-opening of the CARICOM Representation Office in Haiti which will help Haiti to overcome the accumulated delays.

The Prime Minister of Haiti underlined that a new era had commenced in Haiti with the Government committed to modernity, equity and respect for all the freedoms. A culture of peace and dialogue was being established to help the country recover. However, the construction of a new Haitian state would be a long process and there were challenges to be overcome – security, drug and arms trafficking, and the return of criminal deportees, an issue which affected other CARICOM States and on which the Community should work together.

The Conference was also informed of the improvements with regard to Haiti's economy and economic governance and of the efforts to establish favourable conditions to generate wealth and sustainable development. The results expected from the Social Pacification Programme had been delayed by the difficulties of financial disbursement. The Conference called on the donor community to be responsive to the concerns of the Haitian Government on this critical question.

The invitation to the Chairman of the Conference, Prime Ministers and Secretary-General to attend the forthcoming Summit on Drug-Trafficking initiated by His Excellency the President of Haiti, Rene Preval along with their Excellencies the President of the Dominican Republic, Leonel Fernandez and the President of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe, scheduled for 15 March 2007 in the Dominican Republic was accepted.

The Chairman of the CARICOM Task Force on Haiti reported on his stewardship over the past three years of coordinating CARICOM's assistance to Haiti. The Conference commended him for the work accomplished.

THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ABOLITION OF THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

The Heads of Government, reaffirming the view that the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was a crime against humanity, recalled the call in the Durban Declaration for the provision of effective remedies and redress from those countries that had perpetuated this crime. In this regard, they requested the Universities in the Region to conduct research to support this case. They noted that despite the social, political and economic degradation wrought

by slavery, the descendants of the slaves have made significant contributions to the Caribbean and internationally.

Noting that 25 March 2007 would be the beginning of the 200th Anniversary year of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the Heads of Government agreed that each Member State would adopt a programme of activities to commemorate this event as agreed in the United Nations Resolution which was co-sponsored by the Caribbean. They also supported proposals for a regional programme of activities including the observation of a minute of silence in each Member State at 12 noon Eastern Caribbean Time on 25 March 2007 in honour of those who died as a result of slavery especially in the middle passage and in resistance to slavery.

EXTERNAL TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

The Conference considered issues relating to the external trade negotiations in which CARICOM is involved and noted that the negotiations in the World Trade Organization (WTO), those between the Caribbean and the European Union for an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), and several bilateral processes remain the major areas of engagement at this time.

Regarding the WTO, the Conference welcomed the recent efforts to recommence the negotiations under the Doha Development Agenda and reaffirmed that the Region would remain actively engaged. The Conference expressed concern that the process was being driven excessively by the interests of the major countries and that there was the risk that the developmental objectives of the Doha Round could be marginalized.

Concerning the EPA, the Conference noted that the negotiations with the EU were due to be completed in time for the Agreement to enter into force on 1 January 2008 and agreed that every effort should be made to comply with the agreed schedule as long as the Region's interests were fully addressed. In considering the matter of tariff liberalisation in these negotiations, The Conference agreed that Ministers responsible for Trade and Finance, respectively, would collaborate closely, particularly in relation to the revenue implications. The Conference also reaffirmed that inclusion of appropriate development components in the EPA was critical to a successful conclusion of the negotiations with the European Union.

With respect to bilateral trade agreements, the Conference agreed that the Region would accelerate the completion of agreements already in place and undertake further technical work, including consultations with the private sector, to inform decisions about possible negotiations of additional free trade agreements.

ANTIGUA-UNITED STATES TRADE IN SERVICES

The Conference received a report from the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda on the latest decision of the WTO Dispute Settlement Body regarding the case between Antigua and Barbuda and the US on the provision of cross-border gaming services.

The Conference acknowledged the clear-cut victory of Antigua and Barbuda, and urged the US to do all in its power to take the necessary action to bring its laws into compliance

with the WTO ruling. The Conference also urged the US authorities to engage in meaningful dialogue with Antigua and Barbuda for an equitable resolution of this matter.

CANDIDATURES

The Conference endorsed the candidacy of Antigua and Barbuda for chairmanship of the Group of 77 in 2008.

CONFERENCE ON THE CARIBBEAN

The Heads of Government looked forward to the Conference on the Caribbean which is scheduled for 19-21 June 2007 in Washington D.C, USA, which would provide an ideal opportunity to engage the United States Administration and the Congress in a dialogue on issues related to the future growth and development of the Caribbean Community.

Heads of Government anticipated that the Conference would provide the basis for discussions on the possibility of a deeper and more mature trade and economic relationship. They further noted that the structure of the Conference would also allow for participation by policy makers, academics, the private sector, the international financial institutions and people of the Caribbean and the United States to interface in one Conference.

They also welcomed this opportunity to strengthen the relationship with the Caribbean Diaspora. They urged full participation by other stake-holders in the Region and the United States of America.

The Conference noted with appreciation, the support being provided for the staging of the event by the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Organisation of American States.

BORDER ISSUES

Guyana/Venezuela

The Conference noted with satisfaction that goodwill and friendship continued to characterise relations between Guyana and Venezuela and noted the commitment of the two states to the United Nations Good Offices process aimed at finding a solution to the controversy that arose from the Venezuelan contention that the Arbitral Award of 1899 is null and void.

In this connection, the Conference noted with regret, the passing of Ambassador Oliver Jackman who was the Personal Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General in the Good Offices Process. They noted the positive contribution made by Ambassador Jackman to that process.

The Conference reaffirmed its unwavering support for the preservation of Guyana's territorial integrity and sovereignty and its right to the development of its resources in the entirety of its territory.

Belize/Guatemala Relations

The Conference was updated on the negotiations and the ongoing process in respect of the Guatemalan claim to the territory of Belize.

The Conference was informed of the current state of the negotiations, in which Honduras is also involved, aimed at agreeing on the maritime delimitation between their respective territories. They also received an update on the process for the removal of the illegal settlement at Santa Rosa and welcomed the fact that this was proceeding on a cooperative basis. The Heads of Government expressed their hope for an early removal of the settlers.

The Conference noted the interest of Belize and Guatemala in convening a Ministerial meeting with the Secretary-General of the Organisation of American States (OAS) in the near future to determine the next course of action to arrive at a final resolution to the claim. They noted that the September 2005 Framework Agreement between Belize and Guatemala empowers the Secretary-General of the OAS to recommend that the claim be submitted to an international tribunal for final adjudication.

The Conference reaffirmed its unequivocal support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Belize, and pledged its continued solidarity with Belize.

TERM OF OFFICE

The Conference agreed to re-appoint His Excellency Edwin W. Carrington as Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community for a further term of office of five years from 1 August 2007.

The Conference also agreed to re-appoint His Excellency Richard Bernal as Director-General of the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery for a further two-year term.

DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

The Conference accepted the offer of Barbados to host the Twenty-Eighth Regular Meeting from 1-4 July 2007.

APPRECIATION

Heads of Government expressed appreciation to the Prime Minister, Government and People of St. Vincent and the Grenadines for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements put in place for the success of the meeting.

Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines
14 February 2007