



# PRESS RELEASE

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**(CARICOM Secretariat, Turkeyen, Greater Georgetown, Guyana)**  
**COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE NINETEENTH**  
**INTER-SESSIONAL MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT OF**  
**THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)**  
**7-8 MARCH 2008, NASSAU, THE BAHAMAS**

The Nineteenth Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was held in Nassau, The Bahamas, from 7-8 March 2008. The Right Honourable Hubert Ingraham, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, presided.

Other members of the Conference in attendance were: the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Honourable Baldwin Spencer; the Prime Minister of Barbados, Honourable David J. H. Thompson; the Prime Minister of Belize, Honourable Dean Barrow; the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica, Honourable Roosevelt Skerit; the Prime Minister of Grenada, Dr. the Right Honourable Keith Mitchell; the President of the Republic of Guyana, His Excellency Bharrat Jagdeo; the Prime Minister of Haiti, Honourable Jacques Edouard Alexis; the Prime Minister of Jamaica, Honourable Bruce Golding; the Prime Minister of the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, Honourable Dr. Denzil L. Douglas; the Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, Honourable Stephenson King; the President of Suriname, His Excellency Drs. Runaldo R. Venetiaan; and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Honourable Patrick Manning.

Minister of Agriculture, Housing, Land and Environment, Honourable Reuben Meade represented Montserrat and the Minister of National Mobilisation, Honourable Michael Browne represented St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Associate Members in attendance were the Premier of the Turks and Caicos Islands, Honourable Michael Misick; Minister of Culture and Social Rehabilitation, Honourable Dale Butler, representing Bermuda.

## **OPENING SESSION**

The Chairman, the Prime Minister of The Bahamas; the Prime Minister of Barbados and the Secretary-General addressed the Opening Session.

The Secretary-General called for unity of purpose and action to achieve the goals of the integration movement and cautioned that time was not on the side of the Region as it sought to advance the interests of the people of the Community.

The Prime Minister of Barbados said now was the time for the new leaders of the Community to inject novel perspectives and employ a spirit of vigour towards extending the many benefits accruing to the Region's people from the integration movement. This, he said, could be accomplished through progressive thinking and strong vision.

The Chairman, the Prime Minister of The Bahamas, in welcoming the increased emphasis in the integration process being placed on functional co-operation, said this was a continuing effort by Caribbean leaders to reorganize and redefine the Community's institutions to better respond to the needs of the Caribbean people and would ensure the sustained relevance of the Community to all of its people.

## **FUNCTIONAL CO-OPERATION**

Heads of Government accepted the recommendations of the Task Force on Functional Cooperation, a mode of co-operation that incorporates specific activities to support economic, social, foreign policy and security objectives, and agreed to further revise the Treaty of Chaguaramas that would establish human and social development as a pillar of the Community's work thereby encompassing many of the areas previously deemed to be part of functional co-operation.

Heads of Government urged that action be taken at the national level, as required in the Needham's Point Declaration issued at their Twenty-Eighth Regular Meeting held in Barbados in July 2007, to ensure the capacity of the designated CARICOM Ambassador or focal point in Member States to monitor the functional cooperation activities of local institutions.

Heads of Government urged that the results of functional cooperation be publicised nationally and in that context agreed to the establishment of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) services in Member States and Associate Members for the purpose of informing the citizens more directly about the work of the Community and particularly, functional cooperation activities.

Heads of Government established a Prime Ministerial Sub-Committee on Functional Cooperation which comprises a Core Group –

- The Bahamas (Chair)
- Barbados (Lead Responsibility for the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME);
- Dominica (Lead Responsibility for the Free Movement of Community Nationals);
- Grenada (Lead Responsibility for Science and Technology);
- St. Kitts and Nevis (Lead Responsibility for Health, Human Resource Development (HRD) and HIV/AIDS);
- Suriname (Lead Responsibility for Culture, Youth, Sport and Gender); and
- A representative of the Associate Members

## **HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT HEALTH AND AIDS**

### **Human Resource Development**

Heads of Government urged Member States and CARICOM Universities to work assiduously to achieve the integration of the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network (CKLN) and the Caribbean Universities Project for Integrated Distance Education (CUPIDE). This would harmonize the Region's approach to the delivery of continuous learning and the creation of increased access to training opportunities and enhanced skills for its citizens.

They noted the progress being made by CKLN to provide access to tertiary education programmes that are aligned with the Region's Labour Market demands and which will facilitate secure connectivity between and among Regional Governments.

Heads of Government agreed that Member States would implement the Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) system and the related Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQ) in order to harmonise quality assurance and the accreditation of vocational qualifications to support the free movement of skilled persons within the CSME.

Heads of Government also urged Member States to participate fully in the Special Meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) on Children to be held in Georgetown, Guyana, 17-19, March 2008 and to be prepared to outline firm criteria for establishing a Region fit for Children.

## **Health – Follow-up to the Summit on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)**

Heads of Government recalled their historic Summit on Non Communicable Diseases (NCD) held in Port of Spain on 15 September 2007 and urged Member States to cooperate in the implementation of the actionable recommendations. They also urged that steps be taken to involve stakeholders at the national level to become engaged in the process toward achieving a wellness revolution.

Heads of Government endorsed the Plan of Action outlined by the CARICOM/Pan American Health Organisation Implementation Committee for the co-ordinating role of the National NCD Commissions, advocacy, tobacco control, healthy eating in schools and work places, active living and the preparations for the Caribbean Wellness Day to be celebrated on the second Saturday of September each year.

Heads of Government recommended that a media strategy for Information, Education and Communication be implemented to mobilise the Community to take action that would reduce the incidence and effects of NCDs.

## **HIV/AIDS**

Heads of Government urged Member States to play an active role in helping to sustain the important role being played by PANCAP in the fight against HIV and AIDS through the establishment of a coordinated Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework; harmonization of resource mobilization; and the implementation of the overall goal toward universal access to prevention, care and treatment by 2010

Heads of Government expressed support for the new PANCAP initiatives aimed at the establishment of a Technical Support Facility in collaboration with UNAIDS to enhance implementation rates and in-country capacity to manage HIV and AIDS programmes and in so doing commended International Development Partners for their continued support for PANCAP programmes.

Heads of Government expressed pleasure at the decision of the United States Congress to allocate US \$16 million from the President's Emergency Fund for HIV/AIDS Relief for 14 Caribbean countries and the signing of an Agreement for 8 million Euros with the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany for HIV/AIDS prevention.

## **CARICOM SINGLE MARKET AND ECONOMY (CSME)**

### **Free Movement of Skilled Nationals**

Heads of Government expressed their satisfaction that conditions had now been met from 31 December 2007 for artisans and nationals with Associated Degrees and the equivalent to be added to the categories eligible for free movement. Member States were urged to ensure that all the necessary measures were put in place for the effective exercise of these rights. In that regard, where the legal process has not been completed, it was agreed that eligible CARICOM nationals must be facilitated administratively.

Heads of Government acknowledged the right of Member States to verify documents of CARICOM nationals on entry and emphasised that the CARICOM national should not have to present the same documents to both countries but should be facilitated through consultation between the competent authorities of the two Member States concerned. They urged those Member States which have not yet done so to submit the requested information to the CARICOM Secretariat on the issue of the Skills Certificate.

Heads of Government expressed regrets that limited progress had been made with respect to the development of a protocol on Contingent Rights which affect nationals exercising the right of free movement. They also expressed regret that in many Member States, national consultations are yet to be held or completed and urged Member States to ensure that national consultations on contingent Rights are completed by early April.

Heads of Government welcomed the actions taken by Belize, Grenada, Guyana and Suriname to implement the decision that CARICOM nationals travelling to other Member States be granted a definite entry of six months, subject to the right of Member States to reject undesirable persons and to prevent persons from becoming a charge on public funds. They urged the other Member States to take the necessary actions to implement the decision.

### **Single Economy**

Heads of Government noted the report on the establishment of the Single Economy as well as progress made towards making the CARICOM Development Fund (CDF) and Agency operational. In this latter regard, Heads of Government noted the scope of the CDF which would retain the CSME-related special and differential policy measures as a significant component but, for effective insertion in today's global economy, would include a more outwardly-oriented component. This would include the promotion of investment, improvement of enterprise competitiveness, development of infrastructure and technical and financial assistance.

Heads of Government confirmed the composition of the Board of Directors and urged Member States to make their contributions in order to expedite the start up of the CDF.

Heads of Government also noted progress in the preparation of the Strategic Plan for Regional Development and towards the removal of exchange controls on intra-regional transactions by two Member States. They welcomed the inter-connectivity initiative towards the establishment of an integrated capital market and urged that the necessary steps be taken to advance the process as soon as possible.

Heads of Government expressed concern that Member States are still to implement the regimes for CARICOM nationals exercising the right of establishment and the right to provide services – critical components of the Single Market which is now in its third year of operation.

Heads of Government urged Member States to finalise, as a matter of priority, the procedures for the free movement of non wage earners and all eligible categories of wage earners bearing in mind the 29 February 2008 timeline.

## **AGRICULTURE**

Heads of Government agreed that an Agriculture Investment Forum would be held on 5-6 June 2008 in Georgetown, Guyana. They expressed appreciation to the private sector for its willingness to undertake the venture and further expressed appreciation to the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Mr. Jacques Diouf, the CARICOM Secretariat and other institutions/agencies and companies that had pledged financial support.

Heads of Government urged Member States, through their Ministries of Agriculture and their Investment Agencies, to liaise with the Task Force established to prepare for the Forum in order to identify investment proposals for presentation.

## **TOURISM**

Heads of Government agreed to devote one day to a special session on Tourism during their Twenty-Ninth Meeting in July. They also agreed that Tourism would be included as a permanent item on the Agenda of the Conference.

## **CARIFESTA**

Heads of Government commended Guyana for the plans laid out for hosting CARIFESTA X scheduled for 22-30 August, 2008. They noted that the variety of events included super concerts, theatre, symposia and a film festival and that the event has so far attracted

participation from CARICOM countries as well as from the wider Caribbean, Brazil, Spain and Japan.

Heads of Government urged Member States to participate in CARIFESTA X and to provide the necessary early responses to assist the National Festival Committee of Guyana, the CARICOM Secretariat and the Interim Festival Committee to execute their functions effectively.

Heads of Government recommended that the CARIFESTA Interim Festival Committee, in collaboration with the CARICOM Secretariat, should work towards the phasing in of the New Festival Design which places emphasis on internationalising CARIFESTA as a World Event while ensuring that the indigenous components are also given prominence and the regional artistic communities remain engaged in the policies and programmes.

Heads of Government agreed that CARIFESTA XI would be held in The Bahamas in 2010.

### **YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

Heads of Government noted the work of the Caribbean Commission for Youth Development and urged those Member States that have not as yet done so to make their contributions to the approved budget of the Commission.

Heads of Government also urged all Member States to facilitate the work of the Commission by providing access to relevant information and making the necessary expertise available to give advice to the Commissioners.

### **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

Heads of Government endorsed a statement by the President of Suriname, Head of Government with lead responsibility for Youth, Sport, Culture and Gender on the commemoration of International Women's Day 8 March 2008. A copy of the statement is **attached**.

### **CRICKET**

Heads of Government noted with pleasure that the Cricket World Cup 2007 Inc., the company established by the West Indies Cricket Board to run the International Cricket Council Cricket World Cup held in the Caribbean in 2007, has declared a profit of US \$53 million.

Heads of Government commended the Chairman of the company, Mr Kenneth Gordon, the Board and the Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Chris Dehring for their leadership of this memorable sporting event.

Heads of Government supported the need for dissemination and a wide discussion of the Report on Governance of the West Indies Cricket issued by a committee headed by the Most Honourable Percival Patterson.

## **CRIME AND SECURITY**

Heads of Government agreed that a Special Summit on Regional Security should be held in April 2008 to fully explore the crime and security issues facing the Region and to agree to a Strategy and Action Plan to stem the rising tide of violent criminality.

In that context Heads of Government agreed that an extra-ordinary joint meeting of the Standing Committee of Police and Standing Committee of Military Chiefs be held prior to the Meeting of the Council of Ministers responsible for National Security and Law (CONSLE) Enforcement which would take place before the Special Summit.

Heads of Government reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining and strengthening the security systems which had been put in place during the Cricket World Cup (CWC) 2007.

Heads of Government requested that a draft amendment to the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas to give effect to their decision to make Security the Fourth Pillar of the integration movement be presented to the meeting of CONSLE for review prior to submission to the Inter-Governmental Task Force.

## **COST OF LIVING**

Heads of Government recalled that at the Twelfth Special Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government held in Guyana, on 7 December 2007, they had agreed that the Common External Tariff (CET) was the most appropriate instrument for an intervention at the Community level to address the issue of the Rising Cost of Living.

Heads of Government noted that the Council for Trade and Economic Development had considered recommendations from a technical team appointed to review a set of commodities which have a significant weight in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), are not significantly produced or have a close substitute in the Region and attract a CET.

Heads of Government received the list of items that the COTED had approved for suspension of the CET with immediate effect for a period of two years, ending on 4 March 2010.

### **CONFERENCE ON THE CARIBBEAN**

Heads of Government recalled the successful Conference on the Caribbean held in Washington DC, USA last June and the exchange of views with US Congressman, the Congressman Charles Rangel at the Twenty-Eighth Regular Meeting held in Barbados last July.

Heads of Government also recalled the proposal for a second Conference on the Caribbean to be held in New York, USA in 2008. They agreed that the Conference should take place on 19-20 June 2008. The Conference should facilitate engagement with the Caribbean Diaspora and focus on issues related to Trade and Investment; Immigration; Deportees; and Culture and Education.

### **ORDER OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (OCC)**

Heads of Government considered the nominees for the Sixth Conferment of the Order of the Caribbean Community and agreed that the following outstanding Caribbean citizens be awarded the honour:

- (i) Prof. the Hon. Ralston (Rex) Nettleford, of Jamaica;
- (ii) His Excellency Dr Nicholas Joseph Orville Liverpool, DAH, of Dominica;
- (iii) Hon. George Lamming, CHB, of Barbados; and
- (iv) Mr Brian Charles Lara, of Trinidad and Tobago

The conferment of these awards will take place at the Twenty-Ninth Regular Meeting to be held in July 2008 in Antigua and Barbuda.

## **BORDER ISSUES**

### **Belize/Guatemala**

Heads of Government were informed of recent developments regarding the Maritime Delimitation negotiations between Belize, Guatemala and Honduras; the recommendation of the OAS Secretary General at the end of 2007 for the submission of the Territorial Differendum to the ICJ; and the resettlement of the Santa Rosa community to Guatemalan territory.

The Governments of Belize and Guatemala, along with the active participation of the Government of Honduras, met over a period of 18 months under the auspices of the OAS in an effort to identify a possible delimitation of the maritime spaces in the Gulf of Honduras as part of a definitive solution to the Belize – Guatemala Territorial Differendum. It was agreed that an agreement could not be reached and the Secretary General of the OAS, therefore, formally recommended to both parties on the 19th November, 2007 that they settle the differendum through an International Tribunal, specifically the International Court of Justice.

Under the supervision of the OAS, which was tasked with the resettlement of the 17 Guatemalan families from Belizean territory to new homes within Guatemalan territory, 11 families have now been relocated to their new homes in “Finca Esmeralda” in the Department of Peten in Guatemala. It is expected that the remaining 6 families will be relocated by the end of March 2008.

The relocation project is being made possible through financial contributions from the Governments of Mexico, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Turkey and Spain.

### **Guyana/Venezuela**

Heads of Government took note of the recent developments in Guyana/Venezuela relations and the efforts being made to resuscitate the United Nations Good Offices which is aimed at finding a solution to the controversy that arose from the Venezuelan contention that the Arbitral Award of 1899 is null and void.

Heads of Government expressed the view that it was therefore critical for a new Special representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to be appointed as soon as possible in order to advance the Good Offices Process.

Heads of Government reaffirmed their unequivocal support for the safeguarding of Guyana’s territorial integrity and sovereignty and its right to develop its resources in the entirety of its territory.

## **THE HEMISPHERE**

### **Summit of The Americas**

Heads of Government noted with pleasure, that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will host the Fifth Summit of the Americas (V-SOA) in 2009 under the theme: Securing our Citizens' Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability”.

Heads of Government received the presentation of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago on the preparations of that Government for this major event and agreed to support the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in ensuring the successful hosting of the Fifth Summit of the Americas.

Heads of Government requested the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to keep all the Organs and Bodies of the Community apprised of any issues and developments regarding the Summit.

## **ECUADOR/COLOMBIA DISPUTE SETTLEMENT**

Heads of Government received with great satisfaction the news that on 7 March 2008 during the Rio Group Summit in the Dominican Republic, the Presidents of Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela reached agreement to settle the dispute among Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela.

The public show of reconciliation and the decision to restore broken ties between the countries embroiled in the dispute underlined the conflict resolution ability of the Rio Group to which CARICOM is affiliated.

## **EXTERNAL TRADE NEGOTIATIONS**

Heads of Government engaged in exchanges on the recently concluded CARIFORUM-EC Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) following the report by Honourable Bruce Golding, Prime Minister of Jamaica and Lead Head of Government for External Trade Negotiations. They expressed appreciation for the conduct of the negotiations by the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM) and the contribution of the college of negotiators, Ministers, Officials and other Stake Holders in Member States who were involved.

They noted that a number of Member States were still examining the text of the EPA which in some cases would require the tabling of this Agreement in national parliaments. They committed themselves to take the necessary steps to complete these internal consultations in a timely manner to facilitate signature and provisional applications of the agreement by 30 June.

## **WTO DISPUTE**

Heads of Government took note to arbitration under Article XX of the GATS by the parties of the WTO Internet Gaming dispute between Antigua and Barbuda and the United States. They welcomed the agreement by both sides to suspend the convening of the arbitration panel to allow for bilateral talks on a mutually agreed settlement of this dispute.

Heads of Government reiterated their unequivocal support for Antigua and Barbuda and called on the United States to make every effort to reach a mutually satisfactory settlement in this long-running dispute.

## **CUBA**

Heads of Government paid tribute to His Excellency Fidel Castro who recently relinquished his presidency of Cuba, bringing to a close an historic chapter in his political life and in that of the Caribbean. They expressed appreciation for the long and fruitful relationship developed between the Caribbean Community and Cuba under his stewardship and extended the collective wishes of the Community for his continued well being.

Heads of Government also extended congratulations to His Excellency Raul Castro on his election as President of the Council of State of Cuba and looked forward to the continuation of the existing friendly relations between CARICOM and Cuba.

## **FAREWELL TO COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL**

Heads of Government welcomed the outgoing Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, His Excellency Donald McKinnon.

Heads of Government expressed appreciation to the Secretary-General for his sterling contribution and service to the Commonwealth and his commitment to the Caribbean Community

## APPRECIATION TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

Heads of Government expressed sincere appreciation to the Government and people of the Bahamas for the warm hospitality extended to them and the excellent arrangements put in place for the Meeting.

## DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

Heads of Government agreed to hold the Twenty-Ninth Regular Meeting of the Conference in Antigua and Barbuda from 3-5 July 2008.

**Message on the occasion of International Women's Day, 8 March 2008**

by

**H.E. Drs. Runaldo Venetiaan, President of the Republic of Suriname and Lead Head of Government with responsibility for Culture, Gender, Youth and Sport**

International Women's Day 2008 provides an opportunity to explore the diverse accomplishments of women in our states, the Region, and the world. Despite the advances made in our Region, much is still required to achieve women's empowerment and gender equality, of which the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are one measure to which we, as a Region, are committed. We are presented with an opportunity to reflect and review the situation of women. We are afforded also an occasion on which to celebrate the contributions to the strengthening of democratic governance, justice, peace, security and the quality of life in our Region: Dr. Sophie Redmond, Suriname; the Honourable Dame Nita Barrow, Barbados; and the Honourable Eugenia Charles, Dominica, to name a few. We can further use International Women's Day 2008 to symbolize the achievements of women and the progress of their struggle for equality, peace and development.

Within the Caribbean Community there have been advances in legislation and policy, labour market participation and increased access to public resources such as tertiary education and health care. We note that females persistently outperform males at all levels of the educational system, yet they are, by and large, underrepresented in the upper echelons of the management structures in both the public and private sectors, underrepresented also in our government and in our Parliaments. In addition, women are disproportionately affected by poverty and by HIV and AIDS. Further, violence against girls and women remains a major concern.

In keeping with this year's theme of Investing in women and girls, we call on all the member states of the Caribbean Community to generate resources to support the implementation of gender sensitive policies and programmes at the regional, national and local levels. This means establishing programmes that allow both boys and girls, men and women access to economic, social, scientific and cultural opportunities to realise their true potential. Let us resolve to promote gender equality so that sustained economic growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development may be achieved in a Caribbean Community, for All.

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