

**COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE TWENTY-EIGHTH
INTER-SESSIONAL MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF HEADS OF
GOVERNMENT OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY**

16–17 FEBRUARY 2017, GEORGETOWN, GUYANA

The Twenty-Eighth Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was held at Georgetown, Guyana, on 16-17 February 2017. The President of Guyana, His Excellency Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger, chaired the proceedings.

Other members of the Conference in attendance were Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Honourable Gaston Browne; Prime Minister of Barbados, Rt. Honourable Freundel Stuart; Prime Minister of Dominica, Dr. the Honourable Roosevelt Skerrit; Prime Minister of Grenada, Dr. the Rt. Honourable Keith Mitchell; President of Haiti, His Excellency Jovenel Moise; Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dr. the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves; and Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley.

The Bahamas was represented by Honourable Fred Mitchell, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration; Belize was represented by Honourable Wilfred Elrington, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Jamaica was represented by Senator, Honourable Kamina Johnson Smith, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade; Saint Lucia was represented by Honourable Sarah Flood Beaubrun, Minister in charge of External Affairs; Suriname was represented by Honourable Yldiz Pollack-Beighle, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The Associate Member in attendance was Turks and Caicos Islands, represented by Deputy Premier, Honourable Sean Astwood, Minister of Border Control and Labour.

OPENING CEREMONY

Secretary-General, Ambassador Irwin LaRocque; Immediate Past Chair, the Prime Minister of Dominica, Dr. the Honourable Roosevelt Skerrit; and Chairman of Conference, the President of Guyana, His Excellency Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger addressed the Opening Session.

Secretary-General LaRocque, in his statement, noted that the Meeting would address three broad areas - economic development, crime and security and international relations. He noted that the search for sustained economic growth and development was foremost among the

pressing issues that faced the Community and that the CSME was the “best vehicle to promote our overall economic growth and development”.

“I contend, that dealing with those and other challenges, demands more than ever, that we work collectively and pool our resources,” the Secretary-General said.

Ambassador LaRocque, in noting the progress of the Reform Process, indicated that a system was being put in place to ensure accountability in and measurement of the impact of the integration process.

Prime Minister Skerrit exhorted that “the helping hand and solidarity which we so willingly share in adversity must, in the same spirit, be extended to all other aspects of our integration.” He reminded his colleague Heads of Government that he had urged for the use of whatever powers at “our disposal to work towards the speedy and effective implementation of matters we have long agreed upon”. He noted that many of these matters were still pending and the inability of the relevant bodies to meet and finalise the matters was proving a hindrance to progress. “We can and must do better”, he said.

“We are dealing with matters that strike at the heart of both the concerns of our Community and the strengthening of our integration movement. Indeed, these matters are also of great significance to all our countries domestically”, Prime Minister Skerrit added.

President Granger pointed out that if the Community were “to escape the hazard of economic emasculation in today’s global environment, (it) must expedite the full implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME)”.

“The CSME must not be allowed to become a victim of equivocation and procrastination”, the Chairman added.

President Granger also put forward a case for both energy and food security, pointing out that the Region had the resources to ensure both.

“The ‘Spirit of Chaguaramas’ is not the ghost... of a dead project. It is the vital breath of life that inspires us to intensify regional integration”, the Chairman said.

All three speakers welcomed the new Haitian President, His Excellency Jovenel Moise and assured him of the Community’s support to his country.

SIGNINGS

Jamaica signed and ratified the Amendment to Annex III of the Agreement Establishing the CARICOM Development Fund (CDF).

Barbados signed the Protocol to the Revised Treaty Establishing the Council for National Security and Law Enforcement (CONSLE) as an Organ of the Community, and the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) as an Institution of the Caribbean Community and deposited the Instrument of Ratification. The Protocol was also signed by Dominica, Grenada, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

REGIONAL SECURITY

Heads of Government expressed grave concern at the level of crime in the Community and resolved to increase their efforts to curb the scourge, including greater focus on the social determinants of crime, especially among the youth.

In that regard, they committed to ensure their Attorneys-General and Ministers responsible for Legal Affairs take action to finalise Agreements which are essential to the implementation of the Regional Crime and Security Agenda.

Heads of Government also committed to take full advantage of opportunities for capacity-building to address existing and emerging threats, including those related to Cybersecurity and Cybercrime, Crime Prevention and Drug Demand Reduction.

STATUS OF THE CARICOM SINGLE MARKET AND ECONOMY (CSME)

Heads of Government received a review of the status of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) and noted the significant progress in implementation of the CSME. Included among the areas of achievement are the legal and institutional measures and mechanisms to support the free movement of goods, services, skills, and cross-border establishment of businesses. They noted that the CSME was a journey not a destination and addressed the continued work to be done.

In that regard, Heads of Government agreed on priority areas to be addressed, including the challenges of payments for goods and services traded within the Region and the completion of the protocol on procedures relating to facilitation of travel.

Heads of Government reiterated their concern that some of their previous decisions had not been complied with and agreed that the necessary action would be taken to effect compliance.

Heads of Government also considered some impediments to furthering the CSME, including the need for the Organs and Bodies to meet and for effective consultative mechanisms, as well as capacity constraints at the national level.

Heads of Government recognised the supra-nationality of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and the significant contribution of the rulings of the CCJ to strengthening the regimes of the CSME and governance of the Community.

Heads of Government highlighted the importance of transportation to the movement of Community nationals and called for a focused discussion on transportation in the context of the integration movement. They also urged greater collaboration among the regional airlines.

Heads of Government agreed to the importance of continually reviewing the impact of the CSME in both achieving the objectives of the Revised Treaty and on the lives of the people of the Community. In that context, they agreed that outstanding issues will be addressed at the Regular Meeting of the Conference in July 2017.

CORRESPONDENT BANKING

Heads of Government recognised the need for a regional approach and concerted action to address effectively the challenge posed by the de-risking strategies of the global banks which result in the withdrawal of correspondent banking services. They also recognised the need for continued urgent action to strengthen the integrity of the financial system in CARICOM Member States and to attenuate the perception of the Caribbean as a high-risk Region.

In that regard, they considered the Strategy and Action Plan submitted by the Committee of Central Bank Governors and requested the Committee of Ministers of Finance with responsibility for Correspondent Financing to assume the oversight of its roll-out.

Heads of Government agreed that the Region must continue its robust and unrelenting advocacy on the issue of Correspondent Banking. They noted the advocacy initiatives that had been pursued and their success in raising international awareness of the consequences of the de-risking challenge.

Heads of Government encouraged Member States to seize the opportunity of heightened awareness among International Development Partners (IDPs) to secure the resources and support required to strengthen the domestic and regional financial system.

Heads of Government welcomed the efforts of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) to assist Member States to strengthen their financial systems and partnering with multilateral financial institutions to determine solutions to the ongoing de-risking threat to the Community.

Heads of Government acknowledged the multi-dimensional nature of the several drivers behind the de-risking strategies being pursued by global banks, and called for a comprehensive stock-taking exercise to determine Member States' status and ensure that national action plans are aligned with the timetable for compliance with global regulatory standards.

Heads of Government noted particularly the need to strengthen Member States' compliance with the global regulatory standards with regard to Anti-Money Laundering/Counter Terrorism Financing (AML/CTF) and Tax Transparency Information Exchange.

Heads of Government commended the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, and the Committee of Ministers of Finance for spearheading the advocacy initiatives towards resolution of the continuing threat to our financial sector and to our development prospects.

TOURISM IN THE REGION

Heads of Government, recognising that tourism is a vital sector to the economies of Member States, welcomed proposals from the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) for Advancing a Regional Tourism Agenda, particularly through Public/Private Sector Partnerships.

Heads of Government acknowledged the importance of transportation and facilitation of travel, human resource development, the creative industries and marketing as well as competitiveness and financing for the sustainability of Tourism.

Heads of Government agreed that public-private sector partnerships, guiding the development and marketing of tourism for the Caribbean, needed to be more effective and requested that the marketing of tourism encompass, in particular, the eco-tourism product of mainland Member States - Belize, Guyana and Suriname.

With regard to travel, Heads of Government called for an urgent meeting of the Council for Trade and Development (COTED)-Transportation to address air transport issues in particular, including those related to the tourism sector.

In that context, Heads of Government supported the establishment of an Interim Tourism Working Group comprising representation from the CARICOM Secretariat, CTO and the CHTA with the mandate to coordinate with regional public and private sector stakeholder groups, the development of specific solutions which can be advanced in priority areas including the preparation of a pilot region-wide public relations and marketing initiative for 2017/2018 for presentation to the Thirty-Eighth Regular Meeting of the Conference.

Heads of Government noted that 2017 has been declared by the United Nations as the International Year for Sustainable Tourism Development and welcomed the invitation of Jamaica to attend the UN World Tourism Organisation Global Conference on Building Partnerships for Sustainable Tourism for Development to be held for the first time in our Region in Montego Bay in November 2017.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT (ICT4D)

Roadmap for a Single ICT Space

Heads of Government welcomed and approved the Draft Roadmap for a Single ICT Space and commended the ICT cluster led by the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU), the COTED, and the officials who had prepared the document.

Heads of Government emphasised that the Single ICT Space would be one of the driving forces for social and economic development of the Community as it would support the Digital Economy, as well as implementation of the CARICOM Strategic Plan and development of the Digital Agenda 2025.

In the context of developing the CARICOM Digital economy, Heads of Government will receive a proposal with regard to a regional research and education network service at the next meeting of the Conference in July 2017.

Heads of Government were confident that the Single ICT Space would enhance the environment for investment and production, provide an opportunity for innovation to flourish, support a sustainable increase in growth and jobs and enhance efficiency and increase access to public services.

BORDER ISSUES:

Belize-Guatemala Relations

Heads of Government received an update on the most recent developments between Belize and Guatemala.

Heads of Government noted that both Belize and Guatemala have now completed their internal procedures required for the Special Agreement to Submit Guatemala's Claim to the International Court of Justice of 2008, including its related Protocol of 2015, to enable these Agreements to come into force and that the two countries have exchanged notes in this respect.

They expressed their hope that both countries can proceed with the required referendum as early as possible.

Heads of Government noted, with regret, that the undertaking by both countries and the Organisation of American States (OAS), to engage in the design and development of a mechanism of co-operation for the Sarstoon River, remains outstanding and urged both countries and the OAS to redouble their efforts in this respect.

Heads of Government expressed support for the continuous and critical role of the OAS in the process aimed at resolving the dispute arising from Guatemala's claims on Belize and further called on the international community to continue supporting the OAS Office in the Adjacency Zone.

Heads of Government emphasized their unflinching support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of Belize

Guyana-Venezuela Relations

Heads of Government received an update from the President of Guyana on the most recent developments on the controversy between the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the particular efforts of former United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki Moon, to find a way forward under the Geneva Agreement – as they had exhorted at their Meeting in July 2016. They joined President Granger in acknowledging these efforts.

Heads of Government welcomed the decision taken by Mr. Ban Ki Moon before demitting Office and the resulting prospect of 2017 as a 'final year' of the 'Good Offices Process' of the Secretary-General, to be followed by a referral of the controversy to the International Court of Justice "if, by the end of 2017, the Secretary-General concludes that significant progress has not been made toward arriving at a full agreement for the solution of the controversy".

Heads of Government welcomed Guyana's unqualified acceptance of the UN Secretary-General's decision, and expressed the hope that its implementation in good faith by both parties will lead to the resolution of the controversy and the release of the parties and of the entire Caribbean Region from its unwanted implications.

Heads of Government also welcomed the proposal of Mr. Ban Ki Moon for 'confidence building measures' and President Granger's assurance of Guyana's willingness to explore all possibilities consistent with Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity. To the extent that any such measures require regional support, Heads of Government pledged their best efforts to that end.

Heads of Government reiterated their firm support for the preservation of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

CARIFESTA

Heads of Government welcomed the comprehensive update on plans for CARIFESTA XIII to be held in Barbados from 17-27 August 2017 under the theme "Asserting Our Culture Celebrating Ourselves".

Heads of Government acknowledged the importance of the Festival to the Caribbean identity and urged full participation in the event.

Heads of Government accepted the offers of Trinidad and Tobago to host CARIFESTA XIV in 2019 and Antigua and Barbuda to host CARIFESTA XV in 2021.

CARICOM-CUBA

Heads of Government welcomed the conclusion of negotiations by the CARICOM-Cuba Joint Commission on the Second Protocol to the Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement.

Heads of Government noted that the agreed Protocol would continue to strengthen the valuable economic relations and co-operation between the Community and Cuba.

Heads of Government looked forward to the speedy conclusion of the requisite internal procedures to allow for signature at the Fifth CARICOM-Cuba Ministerial Meeting, in March 2017 in Havana, Cuba.

RELATIONS WITH THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Heads of Government reviewed the policy guidelines established in relation to the Community's relations with the Dominican Republic.

Heads of Government condemned the continued statelessness of Dominicans of Haitian descent and expressed concern about their human rights situation.

They agreed to maintain advocacy on their behalf in regional and international fora.

CARICOM – US RELATIONS

Heads of Government emphasised the importance of the long-standing relationship between the Community and the United States of America. They further noted the strong family links between the peoples of the Community and the United States.

Heads of Government looked forward to continuing the fruitful and mutually beneficial relationship with the new US Administration.

Heads of Government also recognised the importance of the recently adopted bipartisan US-Caribbean Strategic Engagement Act of 2016 that seeks to increase US engagement with the governments and civil society of the Region.

FUTURE OF COTONOU AGREEMENT AND THE ACP GROUP

Heads of Government considered the future of the African Caribbean and Pacific Group of Countries (ACP) including the renewal of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement which governs relations between the Group and the European Union (EU) and which comes to an end in 2020.

Heads of Government noted that the Cotonou Agreement is a unique and valued instrument from which CARICOM has benefitted with regard to trade, development co-operation and political dialogue with Europe and should be renewed.

Heads of Government emphasised that membership in the ACP Group remains a valuable construct which has facilitated relations with Africa and the Pacific and that the Group should be strengthened.

FORUM OF CARICOM FIRST LADIES AND SPOUSES

Heads of Government welcomed the establishment of the Forum of CARICOM First Ladies and Spouses of Heads of State and Government Network.

Heads of Government received a report from the Forum and agreed to champion the Every Caribbean Woman Every Caribbean Child (ECWECC) Initiative and other activities focussed on addressing violence against women and women's and children's health.

APPRECIATION

Heads of Government expressed appreciation to the Government and people of Guyana for their warm and generous hospitality during the Meeting.

DATE OF THE THIRTY-EIGHTH REGULAR MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE (July 2017, Grenada)

In accordance with the Rotation Schedule for the Chairmanship of the Conference, the Prime Minister of Grenada will assume the Chairmanship of the Conference for the six-month period commencing 1 July 2017. The Thirty-Eighth Meeting of the Conference will be held in Grenada from 4-6 July 2017.