



GOVERNMENT OF BARBADOS

FEATURE ADDRESS

by

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PRIME MINISTER OF BARBADOS

AT

THE OPENING CEREMONY

OF

THE CONVOCATION OF THE CSME

OCTOBER 9, 2009

Colleague Prime Ministers
Ministers of Government
Members of Parliament
The Leader of the Opposition
Excellencies
Secretary-General
Representatives of Opposition Parties
Heads of Regional and International Institutions
Ladies and Gentlemen

I extend a very warm welcome to Barbados to all who have travelled here for this Convocation.

I recognize our specially invited guests to this Opening Ceremony, for while not participants in the Convocation, your presence here attests to your interest in and recognition of the significance of the work underway in the Community.

This Convocation has a vitally important task to fulfill over the next two days.

I consider the CSME far too integral to our national and regional development not to provide new opportunities for engagement on the complex matters before us.

Our region must adopt new and more meaningful consultative systems on the CSME so that the widest possible involvement is achieved.

The Private Sector and Labour; the wider Civil Society; members of Opposition Parties and others should be provided with a real avenue to contribute to the development of the CSME. And this Convocation seeks to attain that goal by opening the discussion and reporting on progress so far.

Effective engagement is not a simple matter, especially when decisions ultimately have to be taken by Heads of Government who also have other hefty national concerns.

The accommodation of the interests of all the citizens of the Community as far as is practicable is critical.

First, the important question is: are we all aware of the nature of the Caribbean Community and the integration programme known as the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME)? This may appear to be a basic, even insulting question, but I mean no offence.

The Caribbean Community was established in 1973 by 4 Member States; they were soon joined by 8 others. The Community grew over the years to a current Membership of 14 independent states and one British dependency, Montserrat. Another five British dependencies today comprise the Associate Members of the Community.

Of the fifteen Members of the Community, only twelve are participating fully in the CSME. I choose those words carefully as the remaining three enjoy varying degrees of involvement in the trade and other dimensions of the Single Market.

Therefore one has to be clear what one is actually talking about when considering matters pertaining to the CSME. The CSME is a subset of the membership of the CARICOM, but the CSME goes beyond the Community - in that the commitments expressed among the twelve are far greater than those that exist between the CSME participating states and the non-CSME states.

In my view the CARICOM Single Market is working. It is not working perfectly and it is also not above suspicion. But we have before us the report of the appraisal conducted on the progress achieved by the twelve CSME Member States.

This report will form the base for advancing the CSME in the years ahead. It is critical, therefore, that a full examination of the findings be conducted by Governments and other stakeholders alike are reviewed.

The summary report which will be presented to us indicates that the regimes for trade, capital and movement of persons are functioning under the Treaty.

Commercial interests and skilled labour are taking advantage of the common market space.

The Single Market could not have accomplished all that it has to date without the generous assistance of our development partners, the EU and Canada in particular; and the technical and financial assistance provided by other nations and international institutions.

I wish to extend appreciation again, on behalf of the Community, for those contributions to the creation of a new Caribbean.

Their interest is recognized and is reciprocated by the fact that our work to date is moving us toward a new era within CARICOM.

Our Convocation proposes to discuss the findings of the Appraisal on the CSME and I wish to highlight a few of the findings which I find particularly insightful.

As an aside, I should express my gratitude to the staff of the CARICOM Secretariat (CSME Unit) located in Barbados for coordinating and conducting this extensive examination across twelve states.

That assignment was a taxing one because there can be no objective yardstick of implementation.

Countries within our CARICOM have differing capacities and unique governance structures and there is no "one size fits all" formula.

To be brutally frank, varying levels of commitment and emphasis on specific initiatives bedevil implementation in a consistent and timely manner. Ultimately, we are dealing with individuals, individual states and cultural and social nuances.

The Appraisal ultimately sought to assess the extent of operationalisation of the CARICOM Single Market; that question was posed two years after our twelve states declared readiness in July 2006.

First, the team of officials from the Secretariat observed that there was no opposition to the concept of the CSME and regional integration.

On that point, I wish to encourage the media and commentators in our region to delve further into the CARICOM issues and give greater prominence in their media to regional matters.

The Public Information Unit of the Secretariat highlights each of the activities under the ambit of the CARICOM Secretariat. The Secretariat is at work seven days a week hosting meetings and conducting important studies in twenty Member States.

Please note that twenty states, including each of the Associate Members, also benefit from the work of at least one of the several regional institutions responsible for cooperative efforts in the areas of HIV/AIDS support; Climate Change; Standards and Quality; Education and Disaster Management.

CARICOM does not only function at the level of Heads of Government but reaches across the Community to address several subjects. The CARICOM Secretariat can better serve our interests but it needs to be much better resourced and managed.

It was assumed that technical personnel were involved in the work of the CSME in each of the twelve states to respond to the enquiries of the Secretariat team.

However, it was found that, in many instances, the team had to devise and conduct tests in Member States to assess the Single Market and was unable to rely on the interviews of stakeholders as was initially expected. This delayed the completion of the Appraisal.

Another finding of the Secretariat concerns the difference between the expressed commitment and full access to the rights expressed in the Revised Treaty.

These conclusions suggest a capacity and communication deficit which our governments must address as a matter of priority to ensure that we deliver on our obligations under the CSME.

I raise these matters here because I believe this capacity constraint, and not disinterest in the CSME, is responsible for any examples of irregular application of the provisions across the Community.

This is not to suggest that we are not to be held to account for the failings, real or perceived, but rather to point us all to this key area for immediate attention.

The CSME is our main tool of regional development and we must refine that instrument to ensure it delivers on our goals.

These capacity constraints have been compounded by the sudden financial crisis which engulfed the major economies of the world some eighteen months ago.

That led to a global economic recession which may only now be lifting in those economies. The smaller economies of the world, without access to the financial and technological resources of developed nations, must now face the prospects of growth in the face of much reduced international demand for goods and services.

Therefore the economies of CARICOM, amongst the most trade dependent in the world, have markedly reduced opportunity for earning foreign exchange, particularly from tourism services.

Creative responses are required to face the intensifying competition for commerce.

It is to be expected that each state will be preoccupied with national crisis-management. That is why an even greater effort will be required to keep our CSME project on course.

The integration of our twelve states has presented tensions and we must not ignore them. Not only do we have domestic priorities which arise from the confluence of national and global developments but the harmonization of policies. But across key sectors of our economies, the Single Market has challenged the national economic systems in each of our countries.

The question of movement of people across borders has elicited vigorous responses from the length and breadth of our Community. And it should excite debate as an effective Single Economy can only exist with the movement of its people.

We must however be careful not to allow the excitement associated with a declaration of free movement of people – a principle to which we all ultimately agree - to eclipse the matter of balanced regional development.

CARICOM has commitments to the disadvantaged countries, regions and sectors of this Community, that must also be fulfilled in order for the Treaty to function effectively.

That is an obligation we must address as small states and we are seeking to do so through the establishment and operation of the CARICOM Development Fund.

We should not for one moment believe that the world revolves around CARICOM. As the economic crisis recedes, some argue that its effects will linger for some time and even longer for the small states of the Caribbean. What does that mean for the CSME?

Small states in the Caribbean and beyond are now evaluating the implications of a new role for the G20. As the developed and large developing nations craft means to safeguard their economies from another financial crisis, the region must devise an appropriate response within CARICOM and internationally, to ensure that our interests are not overlooked.

The major political and social dimensions of true community must be addressed explicitly, that is, they must be recognized, confronted and accommodated. For too long we have evaded or ignored the obvious decision that we will have to take to bring our region together.

How do you integrate small communities fourteen of which are separated by water; of varying ethnicities and cultures and languages; and of differing levels of development and legislative systems?

It is a conceptual and practical challenge but not one beyond our reach or means.

Heads of Government will consider the views raised by this Convocation in the new year when we meet as a Prime Ministerial Sub-committee to make recommendations for the CSME.

Senior Government Officials will meet next month to prepare for that meeting. Your comments and submissions both during this Convocation and beyond are critical to this process.

Our Single Market and Economy cannot be realized without the participation of **all** key stakeholders. And that does not mean Governments alone. Nor the private sector alone.

Every stakeholder must be engaged meaningfully in the process.

Heads of Government have to take the necessary decisions, but we need to hear from you at this Convocation or in your written submissions and at your public events.

It is my intention also for this Convocation to stimulate a region-wide engagement on the CSME. From schools, to churches, to sporting clubs, to universities, I want for all CARICOM citizens to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Revised Treaty and what they wish for it to accomplish for them personally and collectively.

This is ours, so let us improve and strengthen the CSME.

Today we discuss the Free Movement of CARICOM Nationals; the Single Economy; the Report on the Appraisal on the CARICOM Single Market and the matter of Contingent Rights.

As Lead Head with responsibility for the CSME I call on us all to be practical, forthright and balanced on these issues. While we have our personal and national interests, this Convocation will only make sense if we see ourselves as Caribbean people struggling together to improve our lives!