



# OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

## ADDRESS BY THE

**HON BRUCE GOLDING, PRIME MINISTER OF JAMAICA**

**AT THE 12<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE**

**COUNCIL FOR FOREIGN AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

**CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)**

**HILTON, KINGSTON HOTEL , JAMAICA**

**MAY 8, 2009**

### **SALUTATIONS**

#### **Strength of the Caribbean**

The Caribbean has accumulated over the years a strong, impressive tradition in the conduct of its foreign affairs. We are small, all of us.

We are small individually; we are small collectively, relative to the rest of the world. Notwithstanding our size, we command significant attention and we command respect in the important output of the world. We have led or have been associated with critical issues that have influenced the thinking of some of the major countries of the world, at times when the world faced development issues that had to be dealt with.

These are assets that will have to come to the fore now. These are assets that will have to be put to work as never before to address the problems that confront us, because this crisis is so huge, it is so severe, it is so extensive, it is so pervasive in its impact, that those to whom we would normally turn to for assistance and refuge we are likely to find are busy assisting themselves.

If an earthquake strikes in Peru, the rest of the world runs to their assistance. When an earthquake strikes right throughout the world, everybody runs to fight to get out from under the rubble. That is part of the reality that we face today and therefore, we as a community are challenged to command the attention of the world and see if we can get our voices heard above the noise and the rubble of this earthquake. Some of the aftershocks have not yet come. It is a challenge that we face.

We are challenged also to do everything that is possible to ensure that the leaders of the major countries of this world, in seeking to fix their problems, do not make our problems any worse than they are. There are issues that have already arisen, issues of offshore banking, and when we discussed the matter in Port of Spain recently, I got an appreciation of the full impact that this would have in smaller economies. And yet even in that we have to understand that this is an issue that will have to be dealt with, because there are genuine concerns that these offshore entities are in fact a means of avoiding taxes; that has to be addressed; and therefore we are going to have to, somehow, get through that particular concern of the major countries to say “we understand”.

When the United States, for example, is presenting a budget with a 12.3% deficit and Britain a 10 point odd per cent deficit, then collection of revenue becomes a ticklish issue and therefore their position has to be understood as well. We are going to have to be able to lay a case and say now, “Look, we know you have to take care of your problems, but remember the impact this will have on small economies, like our own.”

There is an invisible tendency towards protectionism. The official position of all the G20 countries is to eschew protectionism; that trade has to be a part of the instrument to get us out of this crisis that we are in; yet almost inevitably, we see a tendency in the revitalisation of banking institutions to encourage them to lend to their own for purchasing their own products and for trying to create jobs onshore; and we only have to consider the impact that that is likely to have on countries like our ours in the Caribbean.

If ever there was a time when we need the sense and the strength of Community, it is now. If ever there was a time when we need to resist the latent instinct that resides inside of everyone of us in the Caribbean; that sometimes when we face trauma we can't resist thinking that we perhaps would stand a better chance of making it if we break from the pack and try to go it alone- we have to resist that. As tedious sometimes as Caribbean consultation and Caribbean action is, we are going to have to band together in a way that we perhaps have never felt was necessary to do before.

None of us has the strength or the size to stop the world in order to get off, or to stop the world in order to prevent ourselves from falling off. We are going to have to hold hands, particularly at this time, because together, I think we can and together I think we must.

We can prevail because, small as we may be individually, we are the Caribbean. We are cradled by North and South America and even though we don't occupy significant land mass individually, together we do represent a huge part of this hemisphere and it is so important that we understand and appreciate that.

### **Matters for COFCOR Consideration**

You have an agenda for your discussions at this meeting that is broad. You have unfinished business that you have to attend to and yet that unfinished business is going to have to provide space for new urgencies. You still have to deal with some of those lingering, almost annoying issues; the hesitant, tentative approach that we take to the fulfilment of goals under the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. We cannot ignore the persistent challenge that Haiti continues to pose to us; to our conscience and the action that we must take. We still have to deal with the elusive Millennium Development Goals which appear to be receding fast before our very eyes.

We have to deal with the challenges of EPA. We spent years negotiating that agreement, we have signed that agreement, and it is almost as if we are done now; and so let us move on to something else, when the application of EPA is what we spent all these years moving towards and therefore the work that has to be done in ensuring that what poses both opportunities and risks, does not end up with us reaping all the risks and not grabbing hold of any of the opportunities. It is something that we have to take seriously and we as a Community must work together.

Some of us have greater capacity in terms of the institutional arrangements that need to be put in place; we must share that capacity. We must help each other because we are a region and we are going to benefit better from things like EPA if we approach it on a regional basis rather than each of us trying to see if we can find our own little stall in that huge market of 450 million people.

### **Global Warming**

You still have to deal with the uncertain commitment of countries across the world towards the obligations of climate control. As we prepare to go to Copenhagen, I still express surprise at the stance that has been taken by some countries – of whom I had expected better – I myself was disappointed by the outcome of the Bali conference and as we prepare for the challenges that will face us at Copenhagen, this region has to have a clear, definitive position that we go there with. We do not contribute significantly to global warming, but our livelihood depends on the contribution that other countries are making. We are a country that depends so heavily on tourism; and unless we can convince people that it is not just safe in the Caribbean, it is wonderful in the Caribbean, then half of our livelihood will disappear. These are among the challenges that we are going to have to take on.

There is the issue, of course, of the flow of drugs through the Caribbean and the flow of illegal guns and what that is doing; the destabilising effect that this is having on us. These are among the issues they were on your last agenda and they remain on your agenda and they will have to be focussed on.

But there are some new issues that will have to be taken on: the evolving character and structure of the Community. We started out, remember, as a group of countries that were former members of the West Indies Federation. We expanded with the inclusion of Guyana, which was not a member of the Federation. We expanded further with Belize, Haiti is now a part of Caricom, Suriname is now a part of Caricom. The character and structure of Caricom is evolving. We now have before us an application for membership from the Dominican Republic. This is going to give further dimension to Caricom if that application is accepted. And as Caricom evolves it has implications, not just on how we operate but also implications for our vista.

What are we hoping for? How does this changing composition of Caricom influence the scope and aspirations of the community? It is something that you are going to have to take on and provide guidance to the heads.

### **New Relationship Between Caribbean and USA**

There is the distinct possibility, and I use stronger words, a likelihood of a new and moiré intense relationship between the Caribbean and the United States. I was very reassured myself in the discussions we had with President Barack Obama, that the United States is committed to a new engagement in the Caribbean and that is something that we have to work with that we have to shape and that we have to define. There is a window of opportunity to the end of the isolation of Cuba.

I say a 'window' because as I sought to urge and encourage at the Summit of the Americas, the normalisation of relations within this hemisphere, as far as Cuba is concerned, is not something to come about at the pressing of a button somewhere, it is a process. It is not a deed and it is a process that needs to be managed and handled very carefully.

Now is not a time for grandstanding, for reckless rhetoric; not a time for us to give greater pre-eminence to satisfying some ego, or finding triumph in the validation of some long-fought crusade. What is the most important thing is the interest of the people of Cuba. I urge again, as I did in Port of Spain, let us not destroy this opportunity by seeking to place it in a context that belongs fifty years ago. Let's move on, let's look to the future and bear in mind that the interest of the Cuban people must stand above everything else.

### **New Relationship between Caricom and Latin American Bloc**

We are constantly in discussion about the broadening of the integration beyond just Caricom into a wider Latin American/Caribbean framework. The meeting that was convened by President Lula in Salvador Bahia, in December, sought to move that process. We offered then, and the offer has been accepted, as the Deputy Prime Minister has advised, to host a meeting of high level ministers and I believe that there is a team due here from Brazil very shortly to begin preparations for that meeting. We are discussing and at that same time, we are exploring because we need to define, more, with greater clarity, the purpose of the scope and function of this wider grouping.

One of the interesting things about this region, Latin America and the Caribbean, is that there exists within this region all of the resources not just to sustain life, but to sustain a prosperous life. The region is not short of energy, we are not short of agricultural producing capacity, we are not short of industrial capacity.

We are a region of the world that has so much potential, has so much resources and yet we never really looked to see how they can be managed to the benefit for the people of the region. I think we have allowed language differences to be too much of a hurdle and there is so much in common with our history and it is important for us to explore the possibilities that lie there.

I am sure that you are going to want to address the challenges that I mentioned before, that plague those countries that depend on offshore financial operations.

I am sure that you are going to want to address the new important issue of the global financial mechanism that is likely to emerge out of this debacle and how that is going to impact countries like ours.

It is important, not just to look at what is likely to happen, on what is being done as a response to this immediate crisis, but to look at what is going to exist beyond. I said in my presentation in Parliament on Tuesday that we delude ourselves if we think that the world that is going to emerge out of this crisis will have any resemblance to the world that we are coming out of, because it won't. The world is going to be reconfigured because of its economic structures and how we are going to try to understand the implications for us here; and position ourselves to respond to those new challenges.

And therefore, as you bite into your agenda, and the Secretary General, and Edwin I do apologise I forgot to acknowledge you, but you are an honorary citizen of Jamaica; but the Secretary General said that he had every confidence that you would complete your agenda.

You have a tall agenda and although many of these issues do reside with other Caribbean organs yet they are cost cutting and they will come up on your radar and it is important that you take them on board. Even though we struggle with them in different avenues and different fora, eventually it is our foreign policy conduct that will provide the support that these policies will need.

I want to close on one point. It is something that I have spoken about before and if you have heard it before, bear with me.

### **Call for Unity**

We are caught, unenthusiastically, in a large, crowded, bewildering Community that is more businesslike than it is friendly. We are no more children of powerful empires. We are no more a burden on the conscience of anybody or of any country. It is something that we must disabuse our minds of....We are going to have to confront with all the muscles that we can summon up in our legs and all the strength in our body and all the conviction in our mind and in all the determination that we can get hold of to recognise that we are on our own. We are going to have to swim against this current by ourselves and the strength is going to have to come from within us.

We have a choice, we can either huddle together, try to draw warmth from each other, or huddle together to see how we can get all of us together and get nearer to the big fireplace. I said before that if I were asked, it is a criticism that I face and we must not be unwilling to be self critical. If there is anything that accounts for the lack of progress over these last 30 something years, or the lack of progress that the founding fathers spent so much time to achieve, it is in my view that we have placed so much time looking at each other with our own pair of eyes instead of looking with fifteen pairs of eyes on the world. And I wonder sometimes how we do not get bored looking at each other so constantly.

We have placed so much emphasis on intra- regional trade. Let's trade among ourselves without recognising that trade within the region may well be a necessary incubator, but it cannot provide the substance for the level of prosperity and growth that the region provides. In the first place, too many of us are producing the same things. But secondly, I do not know of any situation where poor people trade with each other and become rich.

I want to challenge the foreign ministers of the region, as indeed I challenge the heads, including myself, that notwithstanding how intimidating the global environment is now, let us start looking at the world; that is what EPA is supposed to be about. The negotiations that we are about to commence with Canada, that's what that is supposed to be about.

Let's look at the world, let's not be frightened. Sure there are risks that we are going to have to take, but what is the alternative? We can either take those risks, and know that in taking those risks we may make some mistakes and we may get some blows, but at least we will make some progress, trying rather than sitting and waiting for things to happen.

For God's sake, let us start making things happen and not just sitting and watching and mourning and crying when things happen to us. It is no longer a need, it is an imperative and I urge the foreign ministers, since you are, in a sense on the front line, you are the ones who interface with all these partners you are the ones who have to go and touch base with the rest of the world.

In a sense you have to plough the field and soften up that ground so that the rest of us can follow. I urge you to be mindful of the weight of responsibility, the burden that lies on your shoulders and I am sure that you will carry that burden well and help to build this Community that I call our neighbourhood.