

SENATE

**Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade
Friday, 21st March 2014
on the
25th Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government
of the Caribbean Community
St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 10th – 11th March 2014**

Introduction

The attention of Members of the Senate is drawn to the 25th Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community which was held at Buccament Bay, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, during the period 10th-11th March 2014. This Statement addresses the major issues discussed, outcomes of the meeting and the process going forward.

Jamaica's delegation was led by Prime Minister, the Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller, and included the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister and other officials in the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade.

Preparatory Meetings

The meeting was preceded by the *Sixteenth Meeting of the Council for Finance and Planning (COFAP)* on the 8th March and the *Eighth Meeting of the Prime Ministerial Subcommittee (PMSC) on the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME)* on the 9th March. Recommendations from these meetings were brought to the attention of the Conference of Heads of Government for further deliberation and approval under related items of the Heads agenda.

Inter-sessional Meeting

The 25th Inter-Sessional Meeting was held under the chairmanship of Dr. the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The meeting was attended by fourteen Heads of Government, with Suriname represented by the Minister of Trade and Industry, due to preparations for general elections in that country.

The meeting began with a brief Opening Ceremony which was addressed by the Chairman, the outgoing Chairperson – the Hon. Kamla Persad - Bissesar, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and the CARICOM Secretary General, Ambassador Irwin Laroque.

H.E. Serge Letchimy, President of the Regional Council of Martinique, attended as the specially invited guest of the Conference. Martinique is one of the five countries which have applied to CARICOM for associate membership. Mr. Letchimy addressed the Conference on the importance of Caribbean integration and the role that Martinique could play to strengthen this process. Mr. Letchimy also identified several sectors for potential collaboration with CARICOM, including energy, health, connectivity, tourism, disaster mitigation and management, environmental protection and banana research and development.

Heads of Government had before them a full Agenda of issues critical to the development of the region. The main areas of discussion are outlined below:

Advancing the Regional ICT Agenda

Discussion on this item was led by Dr. the Right Hon. Keith Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada, who chaired the Special COTED on Information and Communications Technology

(ICT). He outlined the challenges being encountered and advanced recommendations to address them.

Heads reaffirmed the importance of ICT in promoting economic and social development and considered key inputs for advancing the CARICOM Digital Economy. They agreed on priority areas for development of the digital economy over the next five years, including the establishment of a Single CARICOM ICT Space to enhance the environment for investment and production, as well as the development of a related road-map for its implementation in the years 2014 and 2015. Cyber Security and the development of the CARICOM Digital Agenda 2025, which will bring together all ICT activities in the region, were also identified as priority areas.

With regard to the creation of a Single ICT Space, Jamaica informed on its approach to regional telecommunications providers to eliminate intra-Caribbean roaming charges and advised that Digicel had already agreed to abolish voice roaming on its network in CARICOM countries.

Human Resource Development – Reshaping Caribbean Education

Education and human resource development have long been identified as critical to the growth and development of the region. The Rt. Hon. Dr. Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of St Kitts and Nevis and Lead Head of Government for Human Resource Development, Health and HIV/AIDS, made a presentation in this regard, supported by the Chair of the CARICOM HRD Cluster of Institutions, Dr. Didicus Jules, Registrar of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). The presentation highlighted the need to target all ages and sectors in human resource development and to adopt a holistic approach to the transformation of education to meet the requirements of the 21st century imperative, both

locally and internationally. The areas of special education, research and teacher training were identified for focused attention.

Heads of Government accepted the proposal for the establishment of a Commission on Human Resource Development to shape a Regional Education and Human Resource Development 2030 Strategy which would, among other things, create a framework for the CARICOM Education Agenda involving engagement with Ministries of Education and collaboration with key civil society actors. It was also agreed that the Caribbean Development Bank would be one of the mechanisms for the mobilisation of resources for education and human resource development.

Jamaica endorsed the suggested transformational approach, noting that aspects thereof were already being implemented locally, including Jamaica's commitment to human resource development through budgetary support and partnerships, the establishment of professional bodies such as the Jamaica Teaching Council, the National College for Educational Leadership and the increased use of ICTs in the education sector.

The Economic Situation Facing Member States and the Region – A Framework for Regional Growth and Development.

The recommendations of the Commission on the Economy and the PMSC on the CSME were endorsed by the Conference. These include proposals for fiscal sustainability, including debt management; private sector stimulation and the business regulatory and operational environment; ways to transition to sustainable growth and resource mobilization. The meeting also underscored the importance of the private sector to the success of the CSME and the need for re-engagement with national and regional private sector bodies and identified key sectors for regional development – agriculture, energy, transportation, tourism and ICT.

The Commission on the Economy will continue its work to implement the proposals, a timetable for which will be presented to Heads of Government at their regular meeting in July 2014. It was agreed that a high-level consultation would be held with regional business leaders at the July meeting to address the institutional reform agenda and the scope for promoting public-private partnerships. The establishment of a regional mechanism to provide advice on debt management strategies was also supported.

CARICOM Reform Process

It will be recalled that CARICOM has initiated a process of reform to address a number of factors impacting on the effective operation of the regional integration machinery. The CARICOM Secretariat presented the meeting with the Summary of the Strategic Framework for the five-Year Strategic Plan for the region. It is expected that the reform process will result in the development of a five-Year Strategic Plan 2014-2019 and a transformed and more focused secretariat, implementation capacity and strengthened corporate functions.

The final stages of the Draft Plan will be considered by the Community Council at its meeting in May/June and the final Plan presented to Heads of Government for approval at the regular meeting of the Conference in July.

Climate Change

The meeting discussed the ongoing challenges posed by climate change, particularly as it affects Small Island States (SIDS), noting the recent cases of flooding which occurred in the Eastern Caribbean last December. It was emphasized that the upcoming international meeting on SIDS in Samoa should be used to effectively channel the region's concerns in the outcome documents.

Heads also underlined the importance of strengthening the region's engagement in the climate change deliberations process and increasing access to available climate change financial resources. In this regard, they agreed to establish a Task Force on Sustainable Development to guide the region on issues related to Sustainable Development and in particular, the Climate Change and SIDS negotiations as well as the process related to the Post 2015 Development Agenda.

Membership and Associate Membership of the Community

Heads of Government noted the pending applications of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Curaçao and Sint Maarten for associate membership in CARICOM. They considered the process by which full and associate membership should be granted and reconfirmed the terms and conditions that are mandatory for new members. The matter will be considered at the next meeting of Heads in July at which the Secretary General will report on the result of his follow-up consultations with the applicant countries.

It will be recalled that discussions on the application of the Dominican Republic for full membership have been suspended, pending the outcome of the bilateral talks with Haiti to resolve the nationality issue emanating from the Constitutional Ruling by the DR last year.

The Use of Marijuana for Medical/Health Purposes

Based on a Research Paper prepared by the CARICOM Secretariat, Heads of Government engaged in fruitful exchanges on the medical/health uses of Marijuana, aspects of the decriminalisation of small quantities for recreational use and the possible economic benefits that may be derived therefrom. It was agreed that further in-depth study was necessary. The meeting endorsed the establishment of a Commission to address the issues raised and to provide guidance to the Conference.

CARICOM/Canada Trade and Development Agreement

Prime Minister Simpson Miller, in her capacity as Chair of the Prime Ministerial Sub-committee on External Negotiations, presented her Report to Conference on the status of the current negotiations for a CARICOM/Canada Trade and Development Agreement which are expected to conclude by June this year. They discussed the progress to date emanating from the recent rounds of negotiation, noting that the current sixth round which began in Jamaica in early March will continue in Ottawa towards the end of March, the results of which should provide a clearer picture as to the possibility of meeting the stipulated June deadline.

The Conference reiterated the need to maintain the pro-development approach which takes into account the differences in the levels of development between CARICOM and Canada and the sustainable economic and social development needs of the region.

Ruling of the Dominican Republic Constitutional Court on Nationality

The Conference received an update from the President of Haiti with respect to the Dominican Republic's Constitutional Court Ruling on nationality. It was agreed that the Community should accept the invitation to attend meetings of the Haiti-Dominican Republic Bilateral Commission to allow for discussion on how the human rights effects of the Ruling would be redressed.

Reparations for Native Genocide and Slavery

The meeting considered and accepted the Draft Regional Strategic and Operational Plan for a Caribbean Reparatory Justice Programme (CRJP), presented by the Regional Reparations Commission and requested that the Action Plan be discussed in greater detail by the Prime Ministerial Sub-Committee on Reparations, chaired by the Prime Minister of Barbados. The major elements of the Plan include a formal apology from European governments involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade; establishment of Caribbean Cultural institutions to scientifically record the Caribbean experience; an Indigenous Peoples Development Programme; technology transfer; and debt cancellation.

It was agreed that a Conference between Caribbean and European Leaders would be convened in the near future which would provide an opportunity for in-depth discussions on reparatory justice. Heads also undertook to continue the necessary research in order to be prepared for filing claims against European States.

The Ruling of the CCJ on the Shanique Myrie Issue

The meeting considered the requirements for effective consultation and decision-making by Organs and Bodies of the Community, particularly following the ruling of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) in the *Shanique Myrie* case.

The need for prompt implementation of decisions of the Organs and Bodies of the Community was underscored. Jamaica remained resolute in its position that this should be undertaken without delay. It was noted that the Secretariat was developing proposals and an action plan for the consideration of the Community Council, to ensure that a consultative system and effective decision-making process are implemented by the Community.

Jamaica was reassured by a Statement by Barbados that it would comply “unmistakenly, unequivocally” with the decisions of the Court in the *Shanique Myrie* Case. The Barbados Prime Minister further stated that the only reason for not yet having paid the damages was that the outstanding legal costs were still being discussed.