



Office of the Prime Minister
Jamaica House
Kingston 10

May 18, 2017

My dear Prime Minister:

I write in response to your letter, dated 10th May 2017, in which you shared your views on what you considered “insidious” developments at the Organisation of American States (OAS), having regard to the situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Jamaica highly values its longstanding friendship and partnership with Venezuela, ever mindful of the support that our country provided to its Liberator, Simon Bolivar. Like you, I have been closely following developments in Venezuela and I am disturbed by reports of the severe economic hardships being experienced by the people of Venezuela, certain actions taken by some institutions of the State, as well as the increasingly violent protests and mounting injuries and deaths taking place there.

While I also share some of your concerns regarding adverse utterances by the OAS Secretary General, which have been neither constructive nor helpful and for which he has been rightly admonished, some of the views you have expressed in your letter do not accord with my own. In brief, my perspective on deliberations at the OAS on developments in Venezuela is somewhat different from what is reflected in the tone of your missive.

Based on the principles of respect for democratic institutions, the promotion of democracy and human rights, as well as non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, Jamaica has consistently encouraged dialogue among State representatives to resolve the crises facing that country. These principles are not mutually exclusive and are enshrined in the Charter of the OAS and the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IADC), to which we all subscribe.

When the essential elements of democracy such as the separation of powers, periodic, free and fair elections, access to and exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law are not adhered to, then the OAS is the appropriate forum for deliberations on such matters, in order to help to peacefully resolve the situation. There should be no disagreement that the OAS has been assigned this role by our respective countries and should be allowed to play its part.

Jamaica values its relations within the OAS, an institution which provides an opportunity to collaborate with Member States on a range of issues of common interest. Similarly, we attach great importance to the various areas of cooperation under the framework of the four main pillars of the Organisation and will continue to engage with CARICOM and the OAS to promote dialogue and a peaceful, democratic and constitutional resolution to the situation in Venezuela.

Jamaica, like most other OAS countries, has attended meetings to which it has been invited as a means of being able to obtain accurate information, in order to properly assess the situation so that well-informed decisions can be made. There should be no misunderstanding regarding the justification for attendance at these meetings as members try to find a diplomatic and helpful solution to the crisis in

Venezuela. Indeed, my Foreign Minister has encouraged Venezuela to share with Member States updates on developments in the country. As small countries, the multilateral system is essential for safeguarding our interest. Therefore, as an institution for deliberation and discussion, the OAS should be supported in this regard. The OAS Charter makes provisions 'to consider problems of an urgent nature and of common interest to the American States' (Chapter X, Article 61).

I am certainly mindful of the differing views among CARICOM Member States, most recently reflected in the vote by the Permanent Council to convene a Consultative Meeting of Foreign Ministers to consider the situation in Venezuela. Yet there are certain positions on which we as a Community can agree. We all favour dialogue and reject any attempt at international isolation of Venezuela. We can certainly agree that we will not support any attempt to invoke Article 21 of the OAS Charter. For Jamaica, as for CARICOM, and for many OAS Member States, suspension of Venezuela is not an option. In this regard, we consider it regrettable that Venezuela has decided to withdraw from membership of the OAS.

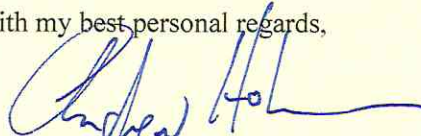
As sovereign nations, I expect that we will each defend our national interests. However, I am also mindful that under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, we committed ourselves to co-ordinate economic and foreign policies and our relations with third states. It is in our interest to keep each other informed of events and to speak with one voice, participating in this process in concert. This is an opportunity for CARICOM to help build bridges and to focus on what unites us rather than that which divides us.

I propose that CARICOM remains engaged through the OAS to promote dialogue and a peaceful resolution to the crisis in Venezuela. CARICOM should maintain a unified position reaffirming the position that Venezuela should engage with its own national stakeholders through an inclusive and mediated national dialogue process to resolve its domestic challenges. This is consistent with Jamaica's principle of non-interference in the domestic space of foreign countries.

Venezuela has already expressed its favourable consideration of a mediating role for CARICOM. In this regard, I suggest that CARICOM seeks to agree on a framework which could guide the outcome of the OAS Consultative Meeting of Foreign Ministers to consider the situation in Venezuela. We should engage in a fuller discussion at the level of Foreign Ministers currently meeting in Barbados. In a context where the people of Venezuela have been calling for gubernatorial and local elections which are overdue, an important question that should be raised is whether the holding of those elections in short order, would not send a tremendously powerful signal of the Government's commitment to democratic principles. At the same time we note the commitment to hold presidential elections in 2018.

At the level of Heads, it would be desirable for us have dialogue with each other at the earliest opportunity, with a view to framing a positive outcome. I stand ready for a further discussion with you and our colleague Heads on the aforementioned points. In this regard, permit me to share this letter with them.

With my best personal regards,



Andrew Holness
Prime Minister

Dr. The Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves
Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines
Kingstown