

**OPENING ADDRESS BY
THE MOST HONOURABLE P. J. PATTERSON, ON, PC, QC, MP
PRIME MINISTER OF JAMAICA
AT THE 24TH REGULAR MEETING OF THE
CONFERENCE OF CARICOM HEADS OF GOVERNMENT
MONTEGO BAY
WEDNESDAY, JULY 2, 2003**

Your Excellencies the Most Honourable Sir Howard Cooke and Lady Cooke

President Thabo Mbeki

President Ricardo Lagos

Colleague Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community

Specially Invited Dignitaries

Heads of International and Regional Organisations

Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament

Secretary General of the Caribbean Community

Special Emissaries and Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Distinguished Delegates

Esteemed Guests:

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

The 24th Meeting of the Conference of CARICOM Heads of Government is a momentous occasion.

It is therefore for me a special honour and privilege to extend a warm and hearty Jamaican welcome to those who are gathered here and to the wider audience throughout the entire Caribbean.

Allow me on this occasion to extend a heartfelt welcome to His Excellency Thabo Mbeki, President of the Republic of South Africa, and the current Head of the African Union, as well as His Excellency Ricardo Lagos Escobar, President of the Republic of Chile. Their presence with us symbolizes the support of two great Southern Hemispheres to our integration movement.

As Chairman of CARICOM, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome the Premier of Bermuda, as that country formally becomes the newest Associate Member of CARICOM.

I dare not ignore the return to our midst of my colleagues, Prime Minister Musa of Belize and Prime Minister Arthur of Barbados, with their refreshed mandates to continue their programmes of nation-building and to renew their energies towards advancing the regional agenda.

Permit me also to express, on behalf of the entire Community, sincere appreciation to the outgoing Chairman, the Honourable Pierre Charles of Dominica, for his well-guided stewardship of the Community's affairs over the past few months. I look forward to his continued collaboration in the Bureau, which Prime Minister Lester Bird now joins, as we seek to address the many thorny issues confronting our region.

THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF CARICOM

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our gathering here this evening holds special significance for our region. On Friday, July 4th, we will officially mark the 30th Anniversary of the birth of our integration movement, having signed the Treaty of Chaguaramas in 1973.

Anniversaries are not just for celebration, but also mark defining moments for looking towards the future.

No one can dare to dispute that planet earth today reflects a global landscape vastly different from that which existed three decades ago. The changes have been far too rapid and profound to permit a full recital today.

It is no accident that the Caribbean Sea has been the hand-maiden of the Regional Integration Process. We have traveled through the Caribbean – from Dickenson Bay in Antigua, where the CARIFTA Agreement was signed, to Chaguaramas in 1973, where CARICOM was born, to Grand Anse in Grenada in 1989 where we agreed to establish the Single Market and Economy – and now to Montego Bay in this new Century where we are challenged to take our regional integration process to a new level of maturity.

Our Caribbean Sea, it is true, has been a dividing as well as uniting sea; but it symbolizes the oneness that most characterizes our regional sense of purpose.

Montego Bay is not a newcomer to this heritage of Caribbean oneness. It was here in 1947 that Norman Manley urged the need for Caribbean unity. It was a very different time, 55 years ago, with different yearnings.

Colonialism was still rampant across the globe, and was the dominant reality of the Caribbean. But the world was moving forward to post-war multilateralism with the United Nations at the center and decolonisation was promising to transform the world. Events moved quickly; by the early 1960s, the post-colonial period dawned

and we were nurtured into a world which seemed to promise a place for small countries like ours.

It was in this environment of hope and encouragement that our integration movement started, and has steadily and sturdily evolved.

That era is now over. Today's world is unfriendly to multilateralism and, in critical respects, inimical to development for countries such as ours.

It is harder now for small States to be heard above the global din. It is harder still for us to assert our interests with any prospect of respect for them.

If regional integration was hitherto an option, it is now an absolute imperative.

That is the situation in which we meet here to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of CARICOM. It is time for celebration of the largest measure of unity the Caribbean has ever known.

It is no small achievement.

And let us be quite specific. It was not an achievement of political directorates alone; it was very purposefully an achievement of Caribbean people. For they have never wavered in their perceptions of Caribbean oneness.

So there is much to celebrate.

But for CARICOM, beyond 30, we must chart new directions responsive to new challenges of the journey ahead of us.

Charting these directions is the essential challenge of this 30th Anniversary Meeting. Montego Bay 2003 must define those new directions.

THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

Our years of difficulty within the regional economy have served to sharpen our understanding of the functioning of our national economies and of the directions which hold the best prospects for the future. The loss of trade preferences means that unprecedented efforts have to be made to diversify our agriculture in order to produce and market a wide range of foods in both processed and unprocessed forms of horticultural products and of fish and fishery products, so that the Region can share in the expanding world demand for these goods.

Among other things this involves the widespread application of the best production practices and technology.

It also requires new entrepreneurship.

Mechanisms must be put in place to pool the entrepreneurial abilities of farmers with those of food distributors both within and outside the region. We must make sure that we market aggressively our most promising food products, protect their brands and negotiate secure market access for them.

In order to make our mark in the world economy, we need to pool our resources of knowledge and skills of research and research development to strengthen our capacity for product improvement and development and for design; building this into a steady stream of innovation as our single economic space proceeds to establish entry points through a learning process for penetrating global markets.

This is essentially the substantive case for the CSME. It is fundamentally about moving on to a new development path, a path characterized by greater inputs of knowledge, new production and working practices, new corporate arrangements, new business methods.

Workers are integral to its success. They will have increased opportunities for jobs and more remunerative employment.

Along with the other factors of production, they will be contributors to and beneficiaries from the rising productivity that an enlarged economy can make possible.

We will need to strengthen and enlarge the Caribbean Development Bank, in order to mobilize additional financing to support the economic growth and social transformation of the region.

We are proposing that the Conference mandate COFAP to consider proposals already put forward by the CDB for a General Capital increase, new membership and restructuring of its shareholding as a basis for expansion of the Bank's borrowing and lending capacity.

EXTERNAL TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

In all of our negotiating arenas, the region is confronted with the erosion of preferential trade arrangements, which encompass a significant share of our exports.

There is relentless pressure from more developed countries to move rapidly to reciprocal trade rules.

This is compounded by the attempts to extend the purview and rules of the multilateral trade system and by extension to regional agreements, which must be compatible with the WTO provisions.

This poses difficult challenges in three related aspects, negotiations, implementation and adjustment. This has resulted in a considerable strain on the human, financial, institutional and political resources of all the states within our region.

The agenda is daunting.

There are those who feel so overwhelmed that they have lapsed into denial or proclaim that there is room for opting out.

Either course would mean relinquishing any opportunity to help in shaping the rules that will constitute the framework of the global economy in the foreseeable future.

We must harness the capability and ingenuity of the leadership of the entire region to fulfil our purpose.

Our mission must aim to ensure that the rules and the pace of implementation in multilateral, hemispheric and inter-regional trade agreements take full account of the goals and disabilities peculiar to small, developing economies. Specifically, special and differential treatment provisions must be crafted to facilitate structural adjustment and promotion of the development of small, developing economies, in particular, the small island developing states.

In this endeavour, the region must be absolutely united in objectives, strategy and execution at the political and technical levels. This unity of purpose and action has never failed the region, but is needed now more than ever.

The three major negotiations, in which we are concurrently engaged, are inter-related politically and even more so technically as there is considerable overlap in the subject matter. The maintenance of coherence across the three processes is a fundamental tenet of our approach to external trade negotiations.

The necessity for close coordination is highlighted by the possible convergence of the schedules of the three negotiations, given the delays in the WTO process, the possible re-dating of the FTAA and the move by some regions to early negotiations for economic partnership agreements with the EU.

Whatever scenario materializes, the period 2003-2007 will be critical to the future of the region. It is therefore critical that our countries begin the process of adjustment to the certainty of change in the rules regulating international trade and to inevitable exposure to greater international competition.

A SENSE OF PURPOSE

This Meeting could not be taking place at a more critical time, as we witness the emergence of a unipolar force within the global village; at a juncture when major perils exist for small countries who simply seek to exercise their hard won rights of political sovereignty.

We assemble at a moment when daunting challenges, unknown at our inception in Chaguaramus confront us in both global and regional environments. They will test to the fullest our resilience as a Community, but they must go further to spur us to a greater and speedier fulfillment of our basic mission.

As an Association of States, we must exercise sovereignty individually and collectively for the betterment of our people. CARICOM must make a material difference in improving the quality of life for the people of the Caribbean.

This has to encompass both material and non-material dimensions.

The resolution of daily pressing concerns of unemployment, shelter, education, health, poverty and social justice must have a direct relation to the institutions of the Community.

Building our human resources must be a pre-occupation in all our efforts.

The most serious threat to human development in the region – HIV/AIDS – must be addressed collectively. AIDS is now the single greatest cause of death among the region's 15-44 age group. This poses serious developmental problems. Unless halted, it will have a severe impact on the domestic labour market and our respective economies.

Improvement in the quality of life of our citizens will be enhanced by :

- the promotion and nurturing of our collective identity;
- creating an enlarged economic space to increase our participation in the world economy;
- reducing our susceptibility to external shocks;
- engaging in joint initiatives aimed at reducing the costs of basic services, and ultimately,
- protecting the region against economic marginalization by making our voices heard clearly, but in unison, as global decisions are made.

DIVIDENDS FOR THE PEOPLE

The people of the Caribbean have invested their trust in us. They are now demanding a dividend from the edifice of integration – CARICOM - tangible results which, improve their well-being.

The Caribbean Court of Justice can no longer be delayed. A sense of self-respect, if nothing else, dictates that we can no longer continue to pin our judicial sovereignty in perpetuity on the coat-tail of an external body.

A People's CARICOM

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The consciousness of our people needs to be aroused to the relevance of CARICOM and the practical significance of the movement in their everyday life.

Its organs and institutions were not created for their own sake. They reflect an exercise in social engineering for the ultimate purpose of improving the lives of the Caribbean people. This is the litmus test by which they must be judged.

Our indigenous media sector must contribute to the recognition of a Caribbean identity. We must develop a communication sector, which is culturally sensitive; one that is fully cognizant of the contradictions and creative tensions that make Caribbean life unique.

We cannot continue to talk and fail to implement. We now need to take steps required to make our decisions, declarations and commitments binding on governments so as to reassure our peoples of our resolve to fulfilling the objectives and goals of the integration movement.

The Charter of Civil Society, to which our Governments have subscribed, is an ideal framework within which to begin this process.

II. The Question of Governance

Colleagues,

A strong and effective Community will require patience, and the acquisition of a broader perspective from our individual stances to facilitate advancement of the integration process.

The time has come for evaluation, review and whatever adjustments are required of our institutional machinery in order to ensure efficiency in the management of its affairs, including speedy actions and decision-making and implementation at the national level.

III. Financing of the Integration Process

Financing the operations of the Community is a costly venture but must be adequately met if our mandates are to be executed efficiently and in a timely manner.

We must revisit the matter of "*automaticity*" of resource transfers as first proposed in the Report of the West Indian Commission. I hope this Conference will adopt such a proposal in principle, pending the technical examination of the system to be employed and the level of financing that would be required.

In the long-term, this would eventually replace annual national budgetary contributions.

CONCLUSION

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the close of our discussions, the Declaration at our 30th Anniversary must seek to chart new directions for the deepening and strengthening of the process of integration in the Caribbean.

It must inspire a sense of hope and create real opportunities for self-fulfilment.

As together we renew our commitment, let it be to a Community in which the people of the region feel secure that CARICOM is indeed an effective instrument, capable of improving their quality of life in a new global and hemispheric environment.

The new thrust for CARICOM must propel us to new horizons. This will demand from each of us considerable energy, immense creativity, innovative strategies and courageous decisions.

Destiny beckons.

It is high time to cross the rubicon.

I thank you.