CARICOM y sus perspectivas hacia el año 2000*

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Your Excellencies, members of the diplomatic corps, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

I'd like to begin by expressing my profound appreciation for the honour which has been conferred through me to the governments and people of the Caribbean by asking me to participate in a lecture series before this very distinguished audience and this Institute that has won such wide international acclaim for its capacity to instill in diplomats the knowledge, and, if I may say so, the nuances that go with the plying of diplomatic skills.

I have been asked to speak particularly on the subject of Caricom and how one sees its future development in the world around us. Caricom is the development that resulted from the collapse of an attempt by the countries of the English-speaking Caribbean to form a political federation during the latter portion of the 1950s. It proved to be shortlived, largely because there was not the level of on-going, people-to-people contact which would be necessary for sustaining a federal experiment, and because it was not buttressed by sound economic underpinnings. And I think from that, there are two lessons to be learned: Firstly, that political federations are not matters which leaders, however well-intentioned and however inspired, can determine by themselves in splendid isolation. It must at all times command popular support. Secondly, we have to recognize that any association which does not have the germ of being able to further the process of economic development, thereby contributing to social mobility, is destined to find itself in serious problems.

Despite the failure of the federation, it was recognized by all that our size, our proximity, our location and our history required us to enter into some collaborative exercise. We recognized the importance of practical cooperation in such areas as health, in education and even as we cope with natural disasters

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that furthered cooperation, in the field of agricultural research, and we sought to promote the possibilities of trade among us. Out of that emerged Carifta, which by 1973 had grown to the Caribbean community that was created as a result of the Treaty of Chaguaramas. I happened to be a part of that negotiating process which resulted in the creation of that Treaty. The situation then in the world was rather different than it is today; and particularly for the younger students and perhaps the more idealistic, it's important for us to remind ourselves, even briefly, what was the prevailing international environment at that time.

The world operated on what was described as the bipolar axis. There was the Cold War tension between East and West that had the capacity to destroy mankind ten times over, as though if you died once, it would not be sufficient. So much of the economic resources and the technological capabilities of that time were concentrated by frightening all mankind with the prospect of a nuclear holocaust. While the battle raged between East and West, there was a division that was not defined in military terms, but nevertheless which was just as acute, and with seemingly more insurmountable divisions: that between the countries of the North and the countries of the South.

Reference was made to the visit of President Echeverria to Jamaica in 1973. He was an apostle of the need for countries of the South to come together in a meaningful working relationship.

It was recognized that the nucleus of South-South cooperation had to begin in each region. Hence we started with Caricom, which was a combination of twelve independent nations of the Caribbean and one which still has a special relationship with the United Kingdom.

What were the purposes of Caricom? To seek to promote regional economic integration; to serve as a forum that could promote cooperation not only between member countries, but between Caricom as a group and other regional blocs which were emerging in other portions of the world. During the twenty years of our existence, we have had our successes, we have had our failures, we have had our achievements, we have had our setbacks. Indeed, during the 1970s all of us fell victim to the international economic turbulence which increasingly made the question of national survival the single preoccupation, and tended to dissipate the energies that otherwise would have focused on deepening and widening the process of regional integration.

As we move towards the decade of the nineties, we all are aware of the profound changes that have taken place in the world around us. There are those who make their business on predictions —some fortified by diplomatic and political analyses, others relying on astrology and other forms of seeing into the

future. But I have yet to meet a soothsayer who even with the beneift of 20/20 vision could claim to have predicted that the changes which have occurred in the world around us would have been as quick as they were, as wide-ranging as they are, and that we would have seen revolutionary alterations in the international realpolitik without the physical confrontation that many had so confidently predicted between East and West.

Yet we have to remind ourselves that although the Iron Curtain has disappeared, the gulf between the North and the South not only remains, but is getting wider and could be more unbridgeable.

This is where regional integration movements have to re-examine their role, internally and externally, in their relationship with each other. In that situation, the Caribbean Community commissioned a study to look at the way forward; how we achieve our objectives; and very importantly, how do we avoid the risk of being marginalized, of being overlooked, of not becoming mere pawns in somebody else's game, but how to chart our own future and our own destiny. For a time the debate had pondered whether first we seek to deepen Caricom before attempting to widen it, or do we widen first and deepen after. And eventually we came to the conclusion that we have to find a way of moving simultaneously and decisively on both fornts. That is to say, we must deepen the process of economic integration, but we must also widen the participation, because no region can survive in splendid isolation.

Accordingly, we have set ourselves certain targets: to move to a liberalization of trade towards the creation of a single market; eventually, to move to the acceptance of a Caribbean currency. That, of course, has implications for the free movement of labour, particularly of skilled labour, and the free movement of capital. We have all set ourselves a time-table to realize those objectives, and particular Heads of Government have been charged with the responsibility of spearheading the activities in these seperate fields.

While we are moving to strengthen and deepen economic integration within Caricom, we are not losing sight of the fact that the world is moving more and more towards a global economy. There is no longer even the appearance of a division between western capitalist countries and the socialist policies being pursued by the countries of Eastern Europe.

The Warsaw Pact has disappeare; so has Comecon. What it also means is that for those countries that operated on the basis of choice between competing models of economic development or of ideological views, there is now a common, universal acceptance that all countries are moving towards a model of economic development which is market determined, and that we cannot rely on traditional relationships or protectionist policies. Rather, our ability to compete

in the harsh realities of the international marketplace will determine whether we grow or we stagnate; indeed, whether we perish as though we never were.

It is in this regard that we look at other developments taking place in this hemisphere —in the Andean Pact, in the Central American common market— and that we seek to pursue special economic agreements with countries such as Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico. Yes, we are at differing stages in the process of our move away from underdevelopment to development. One of the lessons we learned from the 1970s is that if you are serious about developing relationships between the countries of the south, you cannot allow any other country or any other consideration to come in between. For example, we tried in the 1970s to use the new sources of energy found in Mexico to process our bauxite mineral deposits. The intention was noble and good. We made one mistake: We got a consultancy group that was neither Mexican nor Jamaican to undertake that study for us. It was American. And they gave us a thousand and one reasons why it made better sense for them to have access to our bauxite and to your energy, and dot the fabricating of aluminium and aluminium products elsewhere than in Mexico or Jamaica.

This is why on this particular visit we have not only discussed matters of a government-to-government nature, but recognizing the importance of the private sector as the engine of economic growth and development, we are seeking to bring the private sectors of both countries closer together.

So when Mexico wants to talk to Jamaica, we do not have to communicate through an intermediary, and hopefully we don't have to speak to each other either through Miami, or hopefully be able to travel to each other Mexico-Kingston, live and direct.

In Caricom, we are seeking to have the kind of arrangement that not only encompasses the countries in the common market, but all the countries that border the Caribbean Sea. Some speak of a Caribbean Basin; some people don't like the use of the word "basin". All the countries that are within the Caribbean and all those countries whose shores are washed by the Caribbean Sea would all be invited, not to create a common market, not to create a separate regional movement, but as an association of free and independent states that sought to promote the welfare of all its people and to consider those questions that were best dealt with in the context of a Caribbean family of sovereign nations. In that regard, no distinctions would be made on the basis of history, or language, or ethnic composition, or, for that matter, even of political systes. So that, for example, Cuba has a political system which is rather different from that in Mexico or that in Jamaica, but that ought not to stop Mexico, Cuba and Jamaica from working together in those areas where there was a mutuality of interests.

Having accepted within Caricom the need for an expansion of our external relations to include other countries of the region, we have been engaged in exercises of consultation with all the sovereign governments. That, of course, includes Mexico because Mexico has long accepted that the Caribbean represents their third border. During my presence here I had the opportunity of conversing with President Salinas as a sequel to a visit which he undertook to Jamaica in 1990 when we hosted the meeting of Caricom heads in Kingston, and during which meeting he expressed the firm commitment and support of the government of Mexico, to the cause of closer and more functional cooperation among the countries of this region.

It is intended that in October there will be a meeting between Caricom leaders and the Presidents of Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela in which we hope to take some decisions that will more decisively seek to influence the final shape and character of the Association of Caribbean states.

At the present time, Mexico is understandably preoccupied with the imminence of NAFTA, and I think I owe it to you to say how we see NAFTA. As I stated earlier, the world is moving to larger and larger trading blocs. Europe is no longer content with a common market; it now has a single market. If the Germans and the English can, after so many wars, find it possible to live together in harmony; if the French and the English can overcome centuries of rivalry and make common cause in a single market, how much more imperative is it for us within this hemisphere to move towards the creation of what will be a hemispheric free trade area that can unite all the people of the Americas. Therefore we see NAFTA as but a beginning, an important beginning, a step in the direction in which we all must go. We have to be prepared to be able to join that process, to be able to compete, and if we are to be able to do so, we must put our economies and our bases of production on a sound and secure footing.

In addition to the measures we have taken to liberalize and privatize our economy, we feel we have to explore all possibilities which lead to the greater integration of our several economies and emphasize those areas in which we are complementary, rather than always harping on those activities where we appear to be competitive the one with each other. For example, in tourism, whether it has to do with the joint packing for attracting visitors from Europe or from Asia, we have a great future together. If it's in the field of cruise shipping, ships that leave your destination come to ours. They traverse the Caribbean Sea, which is not only part of our territorial waters, but recognized to be the common heritage of all mankind. We think we have to be looking to the future, and as someone said recently "the future looks today rather differently than it did ten years ago."

The Association of Caribbean States will provide us with a vehicle that will enable the sovereign countries of this region to address in a concerted effort how collectively we can work towards improving our economies, strengthening the bases of our production, and recognizing the goals of social equity and social justice, to which we as a people in this hemisphere, must remain always firmly committed.

The 21st Century is not far away. The choice is simple: Do we approach it divided by the accidents of history, or do we face it in a united and collective effort. History beckons us to face the future together, and once we do so, there can be no question that we will fulfill the aspirations of our founders and realize the dreams of the generations yet to come.