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CARIBBEAN GEOPOLITICS

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I thank Her Excellency Maria Holguin Cuellar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Colombia for the invitation to pay an official visit to Colombia and to jointly chair with her the VII Meeting of the Jamaica/Colombia Neighbourhood Commission. I am indeed honoured to pay my first official visit to Colombia and doubly honoured at the opportunity to address the prestigious Diplomatic Academy of Colombia on the subject of Caribbean Geopolitics.

In this discussion on Caribbean geopolitics I believe it is useful for us to begin by defining what is meant by the term “Caribbean”.

At its simplest, the term is used to describe the physiographic region which consists mainly of the Caribbean Sea to the north, bordered by the Gulf of Mexico, the Straits of Florida, the Northern Atlantic Ocean which lies to the northeast and east, the chain of islands surrounding the Caribbean Sea, and the Caribbean coastlines of South and Central America.

However, in order to truly understand the region we must look beyond geography to a range of other factors – cultural, economic, historical, political, and social.

Thus, the definition of the Caribbean can also be expanded to include territories with strong political, economic, and cultural connections to Europe and to a history of colonization characterized by a plantation system based on various forms of forced labour, including slavery and indentureship of indigenous peoples, Africans, Asians and Europeans.

In demographic terms, we are approximately 227 million people living in 25 countries, not including overseas territories, scattered across the largest salt water sea in the world. We are quite likely the most racially diverse region in the world. The process of miscegenation of the various groups which settled in the region has resulted in most Caribbean people being of mixed ancestry. The composition of this racial profile varies from country to country. This creolization was accompanied by a similar mixing of the languages. Today we speak 4 official languages (English, Spanish, French, and Dutch) in addition to many indigenous languages, local creoles and dialects or patois.

Similarly, our musical genres – such as the Jamaican Reggae and Mento, the Trinidadian Calypso and Soca, the Colombian Cumbia, Vallenato, and Porros, the Venezuelan Gaita Zuliana, the Afro-Cuban Rhumba and Son Cubano, the Haitian Compas, the Dominican Merengue, and the Puerto Rican Salsa and Reggaeton represent the fusion of European and African forms.

This influence of our history is also reflected in the different systems of political organization and ideology to be found in the region. Some states such as Colombia are independent republics with over two hundred years of independent life; others

like Jamaica are fully independent but with the British monarch as the Constitutional Head of State. In 2012 Jamaica will celebrate 50 years of Independence, having been the first English-speaking Caribbean territory to obtain independence from the British. Other Caribbean states retain their colonial linkages. There are also Crown Colonies and States which have associate status with the UK, France, the Netherlands, and the United States.

On the economic front, all the countries of the Caribbean, with the exception of Haiti, are classified at a medium level of development or better. Four are classified at a high level of human development (including two in CARICOM – Bahamas and Barbados). This is based on the development indicators utilised by organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme, including the Human Development Index, Human Poverty Index, and the Gender Related Development Index. However, even within this apparent homogeneity of economic development, there are major differences in the standards of living among the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

We believe that this is an important consideration, as it has implications for development. Some countries, including Jamaica, are classified by the World Bank and the IMF as Middle Income Developing countries. As a result, we are excluded from concessionary financing and debt relief. However, it is clear that this classification fails to take account of the peculiar situation of the majority of the Member States of CARICOM which are in fact Small Highly Indebted Vulnerable Economies with their own unique set of challenges to address. These challenges include extreme vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters, dependence on a narrow range of development accelerators, and extreme vulnerability to external shocks.

Our geographic proximity, historical ties, and shared values have helped to forge a desire for collective action among the Caribbean nations. In pursuing this ideal, we have had to address and resolve the challenges posed by our historical differences, the diversity in language and culture, the multiplicity of countries and territories, and poor interconnectivity by air and sea. Nonetheless, while cooperation and collaboration may be difficult to obtain, we are driven by the reality of the challenges of going it alone, and persevere in the recognition that we have a strong foundation on which to build.

Overview of the Integration Movement

The ideal of regional integration has long existed among the countries of Latin American and the Caribbean. The notion of closer hemispheric union in the Americas was articulated most eloquently by the Great Liberator, Simón Bolívar, who at the 1826 Congress of Panama, proposed the creation of a league of American republics, with a common military, a mutual defence pact, and a supranational parliamentary assembly meant to unify Latin American nations against imperial domination by external power. Jamaicans are proud to recall that during his struggle for the independence of Latin America, and while taking refuge in Jamaica in 1815, Bolívar wrote the famous “Letter from Jamaica” expressing his ideas for republican government and outlining his vision for unity in the countries of Latin America.

The countries of the Caribbean recognized long ago that the key to greater prosperity lies in working together and increasing economic and functional cooperation within the region in order to more effectively compete in the globalised economy and political environments.

In the modern era, we have experienced the changing geopolitical reality that followed the Cold War and reshaped the world from the longstanding bipolar spheres of influence. Today, we operate in an increasingly multi-polar globalized environment, with the USA retaining its role as the leading power, but with an expanded and strengthened EU, a group of large emerging economies (BRICS - Brazil, Russia, China, India and lately South Africa) and a number of newly industrialized economies, some of which are members of the G20. The removal of preferential treatment by the EU also had a significant negative impact on the small economies of the CARICOM region that were heavily dependent on the exports of sugar and bananas.

The new multi-polar relationships have led, some will argue, to the shrinking of the geostrategic importance of the Caribbean to international peace and security, with a consequent shift in the way we relate to the developed countries and they to us, and a corresponding growth in regional initiatives for cooperation, coordination, and concerted action.

These developments are viewed by CARICOM Member States as opportunities to explore and activate other economic and trading options and to forge new strategic alliances. Indeed, the increasingly unfavourable and at times hostile international environment for the small, vulnerable and relatively poor states of the Caribbean has helped regionalism to prosper as a response to the threat of our marginalization in the global arena.

The Rosehall Declaration issued by CARICOM Heads of Government in Montego Bay, Jamaica in July 2003 called for strengthened relations with other countries in the wider Caribbean and Latin America and reaffirmed the community's resolve to work

towards a sustained improvement in relations on the basis of mutual respect. To this end, Member States have sought to strengthen relations with traditional partners and to forge relations with non-traditional partners. In terms of our regional outreach, CARICOM has relations with the Central American Republics and Joint Commissions with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, The Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Venezuela.

This process of integration has taken on new and more complex dimensions as countries reconfigure their priorities and relationships. This phenomenon has been described as “the variable geometry of integration” in which countries belong to varying regional groups simultaneously. The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) provides a wonderful example of the variable geometry of integration as it has moved towards the achievement of a single economy at a much faster rate than the larger CARICOM Community to which it also belongs. The CARICOM Member States of Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Antigua and Barbuda also hold membership in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA). Suriname and Guyana are members of both CARICOM and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). Belize, a member of CARICOM, is also a member of the Central American Integration System (SICA).

In addition, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) consists of almost every nation which is washed by the Caribbean Sea, plus El Salvador which lies solely on the Pacific Ocean. The ACS promotes regional integration and cooperation within the Caribbean on issues which are vital to the Caribbean Basin such as trade, transport, sustainable tourism, and natural disaster relief and mitigation. Additionally, this institution has done excellent work on the effort to secure the designation of the

Caribbean Sea as a special zone in the context of sustainable development within the UN system.

The Organization of American States (OAS) includes all 14 independent countries of the Caribbean Community. Through these coalition building mechanisms, regionalism, consultation, and integration have become an undeniable part of the politics and economics of the Caribbean. Yet, as this process of integration advances along the lines of variable geometry and reshapes multilateral relations in the region, it is anticipated that there will be an increased demand for the allocation of scarce human and capital resources to the varying regional integration mechanisms. Concomitantly, there will also be an increased demand for rationalization of activities and increased efficiency of utilization of resources such as we have already seen occurring within the ACS and CARICOM. Jamaica stands mindful of these challenges and remains fully committed to contributing to the dialogue on the issue of Governance within our institutions and the process of shaping the future of regional relations.

The successes of region-building initiatives are still debated by scholars, yet regionalism remains prevalent throughout the Caribbean. Jamaica's own experience at the sub-regional level in CARICOM has shown that the process of integration is challenging but rewarding. Indeed, despite the problems encountered in achieving the deeper integration envisioned in the revised treaty of Chaguaramas, the Caribbean Community has made significant strides towards the implementation of a Single Market and Economy (CSME) and to promote functional, economic, and foreign policy cooperation and coordination.

In the area of CARICOM trade in the Single Market, The operation of a Common External Tariff (CET) confers a competitive advantage to the intra-CARICOM exports of Member States, by requiring that countries outside the CARICOM Single Market pay a higher rate of customs duty than those applied to CARICOM exporters. There is compelling evidence to indicate that without the CET, the capacity of CARICOM exporters to maintain market share would be seriously eroded. The value of Jamaica's exports to CARICOM as a percentage of our overall exports is relatively small, at about 4 per cent in 2009. Yet this accounts for almost US\$60 million in value, much of which is traded by small and medium sized enterprises in Jamaica. There is little doubt that without the protective covering of the CET these companies would find it difficult to compete with some of the larger and more cost-effective producers in Latin America and Asia, and would also find it difficult to penetrate the developed markets of the north where preferences are becoming increasingly eroded.

On the other hand, imports from CARICOM accounted for approximately 15 per cent of our overall imports in 2009, with the largest percentage of these goods being petroleum-related products from Trinidad and Tobago. The zero-rated duty applied to these products allows Jamaica to import these vital energy and industrial inputs at cheaper prices, thus resulting in economies for industrial production and a positive impact on the cost of doing business and, on the cost of living to Jamaican consumers.

However, the CSME is not restricted to the trade in goods. It also extends to the very important trade in services, which accounts for the largest share of the Jamaican economy.

The provisions of the CSME require participating Member States to create an enabling environment for the establishment of businesses in the respective territories. It provides Jamaican services suppliers with economic space and a competitive advantage that are not granted to third states outside CARICOM.

The CSME also provides for the movement of skilled nationals and the full integration of the regional labour markets. Up to June 2011, Jamaica had issued 2113 skills certificates which, once verified by the receiving state, allow the skilled national to work in that state without the need for a work permit. Records indicate that up to 2009, at least 226 Jamaicans were free to move under this regime. Overall, since the inception of the CSME Regime, over 6000 skills certificates have been issued. The principle of free movement in CARICOM is replicated by only one other regional integration movement, namely the EU.

At the same time, the commitment of the Member States to a united, integrated Caribbean is also evident in our effective cooperation in areas such as health, education, culture, sports, environment, tourism, disaster management, communications and technology, and the administration of justice, among others. Numerous regional institutions and agencies help to promote integrated action in a wide variety of areas. The University of the West Indies is a regional university with campuses in Jamaica, the Bahamas, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago. It has

produced leaders in all walks of life across the length and breadth of the Caribbean Community. The Caribbean Development Bank is a catalyst for development resources into the region. The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) mobilises and coordinates disaster preparedness and relief across the Member States. The Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) has been accepted by all CARICOM Member States as the final court of appeal in relation to the interpretation of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, and has been accepted by some CARICOM countries as its final court of appeal, replacing the UK Privy Council.

We are also pleased to note that the Caribbean Community is held in very high regard internationally and is viewed as a valid interlocutor on issues of global and hemispheric significance and on international economic development. Despite our small size and limited resources we have been able to influence important global events including the lifting of the suspension of Cuba's membership in the OAS. We provided assistance and diplomatic support to Haiti in the aftermath of the earthquake, as well as oversight of the historic Presidential elections which, for the first time in the country's history produced a democratic transfer of power from a ruling to an opposition party. Jamaica as Chairman of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) also led the Caribbean Community as it played a leading role on the issue of Honduras' suspension from the OAS after the 2009 coup d'état.

Towards Strengthening and Deepening Regional Integration

Jamaica knows therefore that South-South cooperation involving the exchange of resources, technology, and knowledge between and among the developing countries of this region is a valid strategy for advancing the welfare of our individual nations and the fortunes of the region as a whole. It is true that even while the world is enduring a recession that affected all our economies negatively, South-South trade and foreign direct investment have been increasing globally. FDI to developing countries recovered in 2010, and Latin America and the Caribbean was the region with the highest increase (41%), obtaining 10% of the total FDI. For the first time, developing countries and transition economies represent more than 50% of global inflows and the participation of developing countries in global FDI outflows is also increasing. This trend of increasing South-South FDI has been influenced by several factors including the slow recovery of the developed countries, demand led growth in the emerging BRICS and the economic growth in some Latin American and Caribbean countries such as Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico. The trend has also been supported by access to third markets through regional integration and free trade and investment agreements. Latin American Multinational Corporations – *Multilatinas* – have considerably increased their relevance as foreign investors and have focused on neighbouring or regional countries. LAC contribution to total FDI originating in developing countries climbed from 6% in 2000 to 17% in 2010. As the WTO negotiations appear to have stalled we expect to see an increase in the number of regional trade arrangements as countries seek to continue to advance the expansion of the markets for their goods and services and economies of scale.

In facing the ongoing challenges of the global recession, therefore, it is important for us to reach out to our neighbours at the bilateral and multilateral levels to tackle issues of special importance to our region. Knowing that there is strength in unity, CARICOM also believes that as a group of Small Highly Indebted Vulnerable Middle Income Countries we are wise to seek to build partnerships with other countries that can provide assistance and support in addressing some of the common challenges that we face, many of which we would be unable to address alone. These include climate change and natural disasters, transnational organized crime and the social impact of narco-related activities and the global economic and financial crisis.

It is within this context that Jamaica looks forward to the convening of the Summit of Latin America and the Caribbean on Integration and Development (CALC) later this year. Since the First Summit in Brazil in 2008, the CALC has made progress in achieving its goals of strengthening regional integration and instituting effective commitments for joint action to promote the sustainable development of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean. The success of the efforts of former President Lula of Brazil and the strong support given by President Calderon of Mexico and President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela have brought the process of deepening relations among the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean into sharper focus.

The "Unity Summit" promoted by Mexico to merge the Rio Group and CALC into a single entity advanced this integration even further. As Venezuela concludes its chairmanship of the CALC in 2011 and as Chile takes over in 2012, we expect to witness another significant development – that of the full establishment of the Community of Latin America and Caribbean States, the CELAC - a historic example

of how we can widen the axis of support and cooperation in this region and in the hemisphere.

Jamaica, which represents CARICOM on the Rio Group, has played an important role on behalf of the Community in the hemispheric movement to promote integration and development among the countries of the region. Jamaica hosted the meeting of Rio Group and CALC Foreign Ministers in Montego Bay in 2009, which adopted the Montego Bay Declaration as the blue print for economic, social and cultural integration among Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Jamaica-Colombia Relations

In terms of Jamaica/Colombia bilateral cooperation, we are also pleased to have in addition to these regional mechanisms the Jamaica/Colombia Bi-national Neighbourhood Commission (BNC) established under the 1994 Technical and Scientific Cooperation Agreement. This Commission acts as the main mechanism for the promotion of high level contacts and facilitates cooperation activities between Jamaica and Colombia. We highly value our relationship with Colombia and look forward to the further strengthening of our relations as we seek to cooperate on issues that will redound to the benefit of both our countries and peoples, including the exploration and administration of the resources located within the Joint Regime Area (JRA) established by the 1993 Jamaica/Colombia Maritime Delimitation Treaty.

Colombia, like Jamaica, has faced the challenge of overcoming crime and security issues to create a more peaceful society conducive to business which fosters the growth and development of the economy and our people. We believe that there is much that we can learn from each other through bilateral cooperation and within our regional institutions. The Cooperation between the Jamaica Constabulary Force and the National Police of Colombia, which includes training in narcotic interdiction, intelligence, special operations, and citizen security, is one example of a useful program with the potential for significant impact. Other areas include Cooperation in Anti-Terrorism Financing and Money Laundering between the Information and financial Analysis Unit of Colombia and the UIAF and the Financial Investigations Division (FID) of Jamaica. In other areas we look forward to the negotiation of an Air Services Agreement that will open the route for travel and trade between our countries and increased tourism and people-top-people contacts. Jamaica is also eager to share its expertise in the area of sports and culture and looks forward to the conclusion of the Cultural, Educational and Sports Framework Agreement between the Governments of Jamaica and Colombia.

Conclusion

As independent nations and developing countries we have been working to forge our path in the international community of states. Throughout this journey we have shared ideas on the organization of our economies and societies and our heroes, such as Simon Bolivar, Jose Marti and Marcus Garvey, celebrated within our nations are often recognised beyond our own borders for the impact which they have had in advancing the cause of the peoples of the Latin American and Caribbean region. We

draw upon this history even as we look forward to addressing in partnership the emerging challenges of our times.

As Colombia prepares to host the VI Summit of Americas in April 2012 under the theme “Connecting the Americas: Partners for Prosperity” Jamaica wishes to express its support for the successful hosting of this event. We welcome the proposed thematic areas identified by Colombia, namely natural disasters, security, the high levels of poverty and inequality, and access to information technology, along with the overarching issues of cooperation and physical integration. We also welcome the emphasis placed on “an association of American States” to improve the quality of life of the peoples of the hemisphere including the focus on cooperation to reduce poverty, and the need for innovative instruments to address poverty and social inequity at the bilateral regional, and multilateral levels. To this end, we look forward to a fruitful exchange and a successful VI Summit of the Americas.

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