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Constructing a Cohesive and Substantive Platform of the Caribbean Diaspora in North America that would Contribute to the Development of the Caribbean

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Good morning. The honorable Prime Minister Dr Kenny Anthony, honorable Ambassadors and other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. First let me extend my thanks to Mr. Halim Majeed and Ambassador Eugene Pursoo for inviting me to participate in this forum. Both of these individuals- Mr. Majeed in particular- have been doing invaluable work in bringing to the public forum the issues, controversies and debates emanating from the thematic context of the Caribbean Diaspora. This is essential if there is to be a maximizing of the substantive knowledge base in this area, as well as a linkage with the more pragmatic and policy making aspects of this important topic.

Secondly, I would like to disclaim, despite my presence here, any elevated or distinguished status as an expert, rather my interests and perspectives emanate, more correctly, as a University Administrator and Professor in three of the largest systems of higher education in the USA-SUNY, CUNY, CSU- where some of these endeavors have caused me to deal, theoretically and practically, with Caribbean and other diasporic issues with a view to educating significant peers and bringing solutions to pressing demands for these diasporic communities when necessary.

Whether we deal with the African, Caribbean, Asian Indian, Chinese, Jewish or other Diasporas we are forced to deal contextually with the concomitant issues of development, migration, transnationalism, globalization and the more direct issue of Poverty and its alleviation or eradication. For many of the current diasporas – whatever their initial origins- now focus heavily on the push/ pull and even circulatory migration from peripheral to core societies and, further, how these now existent diasporic formations can act as a development or change agent in the home and host countries, both. This is our task today as I see it.

Again, and fortunately for me, this academic and professional endeavor has been undertaken previously, and there is a solid body of work on which to draw and to contextualize.* I would extrapolate, from these bodies of research, that some of the salient issues affecting the Caribbean Diaspora are : remittances; deportation and security; HIV/AIDS and security; the brain drain and high-skilled emigration; diasporic exports and migrant investment in home country associations; andThe ultimate question always being how to find platforms which will initialize, sustain and maximize development between and among the Caribbean region and its institutions. To borrow from the dicta of

Jamaican PM PJ Patterson: “how can we enhance the Caribbean Civilization by intensifying the connectedness.” I would argue that we can strive to reach that goal by utilizing a tripartite paradigm: based on the three platforms of political, economic and cultural foci.

Political:

The political connection is seen as a key component in building this sustainable platform and although there have been many formulations* I would contend that a key issue in strengthening the collaboration, and the maintaining of “stakeholders” in the Diaspora is by intertwining them with the concept of dual citizenship between host and home(donor) countries. Connecting Caribbean Diasporas in a practical way via the electorate will bring greater demands for support of political transparency in the political process and a greater of activity. This should be seen within the context of the USA, Canada and other G8 nations focus on the adoption of a budding and vibrant democratic culture in the hemisphere, and active and relatively free political participation of the citizenry as a condition for the allocation of development funds- a goal clearly spelled out by former US Secretary of State, Colin Powell; and further refined by his successor Condi Rice*

In some instances this connection has led to diasporic nationals assuming political office in the home country with some measure of success;* but more importantly it allows for a greater collective lobbying interests between local political elites here in the USA and North America, and the host society. A good example of this is the stronghold that the Dominican[Republic] diasporic community has established in New York where both gubernatorial and mayoral candidates make frequent and pivotal visits in their campaign stops, and where this arrangement has helped the host society to build better economic and security arrangements with the USA in a post 9/11 era.

These connections would not negate other political associations with the home country; it would vitiate them by giving the “diasporic others” a sunken cost in the consequences of the political decision and trajectory of the home societies. I would not conjecture as to how or what format the voting and electoral processes should take in the homelands, but some may recall the overseas voting experiments in the newly independent nation of Guyana which, though alleged to be marred by massive fraud, did cause a heightened level of political participation and activity by many diasporic elements in the country’s political affairs with mixed results. In the final analysis the end point would be to initiate the political integration of the Diaspora by the home government and, hopefully, a core positive attitude of host government and population towards ethnic national Diasporas.

Economic:

Normally, when one thinks of economic factors one can easily conceptualize trade relationships, remittances and banking relationships for example. However education, and the investment in such, can also be a clear economic multiplier* One uniqueness of the Caribbean Diaspora has been its superlative educational excellence at all levels given the relative size of its demographics as compared to India, China and other land masses, and ethnic nationalities. Caribbean diasporas (first, second and later generations) have excelled in the

student bodies and faculties at many elite and public universities where meritocracy and universal criteria abound.* In the more particularistic realms of administration their success is more limited but can be expected to grow as the political and economic clout of the community increase.*Much of this success is based on the strong skills base, competitive excellence of primary and secondary institutions which laid the foundation for the earlier diasporic cohorts .Unfortunately, this competitive edge is being lost at the primary and secondary levels, and the universal completion of primary education-one of the ten Millennium Development Goals- has not yet been fully achieved in Belize and Guyana*Further, a World bank report informs the diminishing quality of education in segments of the primary school and a low enrollment in tertiary education -6 percent in 1980 as compared to around 15 percent in 2000 – as compared to Latin America and the World, with only Barbados succeeding in continued expansion of tertiary education*The implications of this for a widening of the skills gap with the rest of the world, and for technology absorption and competitiveness are immense*

There have been earlier arrangements with island nations such that their secondary schools could send their best students to study at American and Canadian Universities with a view to returning home for some period of time after their studies were completed. The Burnham regime enjoyed this arrangement with American and Puerto Rican universities during his time in the opposition in the early 1960s and later in the government; as did his counterpart Cheddi Jagan with eastern bloc and soviet universities. This was also true in the case of the island of St Vincent which sent its leaders from its top secondary schools to Yale University for undergraduate study. One successful example is US Ambassador to Trinidad, Roy Austin who attended Yale University where he met and befriended President Bush, and was invited to join the prestigious but secret Skulls and Bones society which includes among its membership many top elected elites in the world, including many US Presidents and top business officials. Both Senator Kerry and President Bush were inducted one year apart, for example.

It would be advantageous for the Diaspora experts who are alumni and otherwise well placed in the university systems in North America to help facilitate beneficial arrangements whereby more tertiary education students could be trained abroad at both public and private universities with foreign aid and other such forms of appropriations with the State department, education and even Defense being used to cover most of the costs. This was done excessively during the height of the cold war and now, initially under the leadership of former Secretary Powell, a similar model is being used on a smaller scale in the aggressive use of “soft power in the war on terrorism- especially in the Middle East. Diaspora experts can make these linkages with large university systems in New York, California, for example, and with other North American colleges and universities in Canada. It should be noted, for example, that both the current vice Chancellor Nigel Harris of UWI (he at Morehouse Medical School in Atlanta), and Principal Ken Hall (he at SUNY Central and the College at Old Westbury) have had these utilitarian experiences. And there are others : Ewart Thomas ,the former Dean of Humanities at Stanford and still a key player at the University that spawned Secretary Rice with whom he served; Marcia Keizs ,now President at York College /CUNY ; Basil Wilson, Provost at John Jay College/CUNY and former

provost and Business school dean Tony Bonaparte at Pace and now St. John's Universities are but a few examples of key diasporic actors who could be key pivotal participants if correctly socialized, and who have already played such facilitative roles in extending positive relationships for their diasporic home countries and their students, on a less public scale.

In some instances NGOs and philanthropic organizations such as Ford Foundation formerly led by a diasporic Caribbean, Franklin Thomas, have taken such a facilitative role in the 1980's, as has Varta Gregorian at Carnegie (mainly in Africa); with Rockefeller University also helping mainly with agricultural developments and training in past years.

Currently Colin Powell is helping his alma mater CCNY which has a large Caribbean student population; Bruce Llewellyn his cousin is doing the same on the CUNY Graduate School and University Center's Foundation Board where he has raised much funds for Caribbean and other students, as well as donate resources for scholarships for them.

Sure there would have to be partnership and identification in critical areas of "felt needs". For instance tourism studies could be developed with partnerships at FIU (diaspora experts serve there also) and at Cornell- SUNY land grant college. Also at one point such discussions were undertaken with former SUNY Chancellor Tom Bartlett-himself and internationally respected educator; and most recently with former Chancellor Robert King also of SUNY.

Indeed, some of these initiatives are now undertaken, but unfortunately there are piecemeal, segmented and not coordinated for maximum effect. The point here is that Caribbean Diaspora experts, now strategically positioned, can, with the correct posture, appeal and structural affiliations, be persuaded and convinced to be interconnected with helping the development goals of the homelands.

Successful arrangements at this platform would ratchet up economic multiplier effects for the home societies and help address the dangerous slippage in education now highlighted by the recent World Bank report which, as the Report so correctly states is a "large agenda, and one that requires considerable political will and leadership"*

If embraced and utilized as pivotal stakeholders Caribbean Diaspora experts can play a pivotal role in this regard, and my understanding is that such a modified role is already being addressed by UWI Vice Chancellor Nigel Harris. This is a minimal step in the right direction.

Social

Dr Patrick Mendis in 2002 at a Conference on Sustainable Development, focusing largely on Africa, introduced a new development concept of "virtuous circle" as a new concept of sustainable development that goes beyond per capita indexes and the calculus of economics*. A concept that focuses on the three pillars of human development that the UNDP proposed: economic growth, social development and environmental protection*

Professor Simon Tay a Singaporean scholar explicated it more when he contends that the virtuous circle would include an activism in development that includes the little people -such as women, children the undereducated and the rural poor. * The point here is that the development ideology and models must be tied to a sort of

growth equity which ties all segments of the society together so that they interact with the various engines and resources of development at their own levels of empowerment.* In short, to use Caribbean scholar's Lloyd Best dicta: helping to, "Make the small man, a real man."

The successes of Hometown Association, (HTAs), in Latin America especially in Mexico and to a lesser extent in the Caribbean are but few such examples. There it has been shown how these associations work with home governments and local participants to extend the development imperative by collaborating and agreeing on projects that benefit and bring needed relief, where they are identified locally as being best needed. This also inculcated a sense of civic involvement and participation, by rewarding creativity and innovation. Many such small scale development projects _water wells, health centers, technical schools etc- have been delivered in this regard, in a "win win situation", and currently is often exemplified by the civic affairs officers of the military in the USA and other nations. In Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, there are military officers who, with the help of the native Iraqis, are building schools, recreation centers, hospitals etc, even as they execute a war against an entrenched and growing insurgency.

In 1966, as a young administrative cadet in the office of the late PM Forbes Burnham, on the eve of political independence and on my way to graduate school in Canada, I had formulated such a model called CIP- Community Independence Projects- to be completed one year after the formal granting of independence. Then, the process was to involve local (mainly rural communities) to work with the central national government in identifying felt needs in a democratically participatory way. Once there was agreement on these projects the government would invest one third toward the cost, foreign aid another one third, and the community the final third. Then, the community's cost could be indicated by proffering labor or donating financial resources collected from HTAs in the Diasporas. A year later many of these projects had a high rate of completion because of the social participation engendered by introducing "sunken costs" from the communities.

The major success there was the maximization of economic and social goals through participatory democracy often utilizing women as the pivotal change agents and actors.

Conclusion:

I have not touched on other critical areas such as the utilization of "virtual linkages" which are independent, non political and non-profit networks facilitating skills transfer and capacity -building, of which the South African Network of Skills Abroad (SANSA), with members in 68 countries are a prime example of success*. There exists many such linkages in the Caribbean Diaspora communities in North America, and they were extremely helpful recently in dealing with the hurricanes and floods which ravaged the regions. Nor have I dealt with an issue that Professor Percy Hintzen of UC Berkeley focused on a few years ago; and that is the rivalry, at times hostility and other dysfunctionality which exist in home societies, and otherwise negatively impact relationship with the Diaspora communities.* This phenomenon plagued the post independence

Burnham regime in the 1970s and is said to also impact on the ability of the current Jagdeo government in their attempts to initiate successful Diaspora recruitment of Guyanese , for example. Of course, this phenomenon is not unique to Guyana but exists elsewhere in the Caribbean.

Let me end by stating that, as globalization continues apace, transnationals will continue to forge multi faceted and stranded relationship that connect their societies of origin with the societies of settlement* Relationships that will soan borders.

Pires-Hester uses the concept of “bilateral diasporas ethnicity”, defined as “the strategic use of ethnic identification with overseas homeland to benefit that homeland, through relations with systems and institutions of the current actual homeland”*

These are centripetal ties that bind and my hope is that these discussions, and proceedings engaged in today will result in the realization of these goals for the Caribbean Diaspora.

‘I thank you