

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SURINAME,
HIS EXCELLENCY RUNALDO RONALD VENETIAAN,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE REGIONAL YOUTH FORUM
OF CARICOM ON 27 JANUARY 2010**

Protocol observed.

A special welcome to the delegation of Haiti.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This forum takes place at an appropriate time – at the commencement of the International Year of the Youth and on the eve of the presentation of the Commission on Youth Development’s report to CARICOM Heads of Government.

Youth leaders from across the region have come together to discuss issues of importance to them. CARICOM Youth Ambassadors, national youth councils and other youth organizations/NGOs and CBOs, have converged to discuss their role in regional integration and, in that regard, the CSME.

The Commission's report on the situation of Caribbean youth makes it clear that time is not on the Community's side if we are to remain competitive in this era of globalization. The issues are complex – economic decline, ineffective education systems, declining influence of family, community, school; the flight of skills to countries outside of the region, escalating crime and violence, HIV and AIDS, environmental degradation, dynamic social and economic change, an inability to keep pace with constantly changing technologies, cultural penetration, and the list goes on and on.

The issues highlighted by the Commission are not new but their scope, impact and intensity have reached crisis proportions in most parts of the Caribbean. The development of legal and economic systems to counter the threat of globalization has occupied the attention of Heads of Government for two decades, and Governments, with support from development partners, have invested millions of dollars during that same period in skills training, entrepreneurship, adolescent health and healthy sexuality and other initiatives targeting youth. Today, however, it is clear that the social and economic infrastructure in CARICOM and Associate States is under threat, in particular in relation to the CARICOM Youth.

It is clear that we cannot, in this, the 21st century, make a distinction between youth development, human and social development and regional development systems. It is equally clear that regional integration is not optional. Radical change is necessary.

Our youth does not mean trouble and only trouble. Our youth have a creativity and ingenuity that we must implement in a substantive and continuous manner.

As I understand it, the CARICOM Youth Forum will speak to mechanisms and strategies for channeling the assets and energies of youth into channels for social and economic development at community and national levels integrate them into regional decision making processes, foster a sense of regional identity, common destiny and appreciation among young people.

We therefore look forward to the recommendations of this forum.

Having said this, I declare this Regional Youth Forum, open.

I thank you.