

Address by
His Excellency Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan,
President of the Republic of Suriname and
outgoing Chairman of the Conference, on the occasion of the
opening of the Twenty-sixth Regular Meeting of the
Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean
Community

3-6 July, 2005, St. Lucia

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government of the Caribbean Community
Your Excellency Dr. Leonel Fernandez, President of the Dominican Republic
Your Excellency Edwin Carrington, Secretary General of the Caribbean Community,
Your Excellency Enrique Iglesias, outgoing President of the Inter- American
Development Bank
Your Excellency Dr. Jose Miguel Insulza, Secretary- General of the Organisation of
American States
Distinguished Ministers,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Representatives of international and regional organisations and institutions,
Distinguished representatives of the business community, trade unions and civil society,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It was indeed a great pleasure and honour for me to chair the Conference of Heads of Government over the past six months. I take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to you, colleagues, for your support as well as to the distinguished Secretary General Carrington and his staff for the wise counsel during my Chairmanship.

As you may be aware, general elections were held in Suriname on 25th May 2005. Three days ago the members of the National Assembly were installed and negotiations are on-going in the formation of a new Government.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During my chairmanship the Community continued its efforts to strengthen the integration process and find answers on regional and international challenges. Many of the issues we dealt with during the 16th Inter-Sessional Meeting, return to our agenda at this 26th regular Conference.

The establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy will require our continued commitment at all levels, both politically and technically. No doubt, the pace of preparations for the implementation of the CSME needs to increase. It is with distinct pleasure that I announce that the Republic of Suriname will fulfil its obligations and is continuing the process to be CSME ready by the end of December 2005. I also welcome the contribution of opposition leaders in the process of the CSME.

A historical milestone for the Community's integration process was the inauguration of the Caribbean Court of Justice in April of this year in Trinidad and Tobago. The CCJ marks indeed a step further in the completion of the integration process, and will provide the necessary legal certainties in the implementation of the provisions of the revised treaty of Chaguaramas.

Another important initiative that requires intensive deliberations and firm decisions are the recommendations of the Prime Ministerial Expert Group on Governance regarding the further strengthening of the structure and operations of the Caribbean Community. Specific attention needs to be accorded to the institutionalisation of the Assembly of the Caribbean Community Parliamentarians, as a vehicle for continued dialogue between coalition and opposition on regional matters.

I hold the view that it is of critical importance to enhance the awareness of the Caribbean People at large regarding the major initiatives currently underway, such as the CSME, the CCJ, coordinated foreign policy and external economic negotiations, as well as with regard to major challenges, like HIV/AIDS. To be effective on a longer term, I believe that specific efforts should be made towards the youth and the Caribbean diaspora.

Suriname has made great strides in this regard, through the Youth Parliament and the work of the CARICOM Youth Ambassadors Program.

Of historical importance was also the official opening of the Headquarters of the CARICOM Secretariat on 19th February of this year. We thank the Government of Guyana for providing the CARICOM Secretariats Staff with a more friendly and conducive working environment.

Distinguished Heads of Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Several foreign policy positions were developed in the past months. CARICOM contributed in a meaningful manner to the completion of the leadership of the Organization of American States. We are pleased to have in our midst the Secretary General of the OAS, Dr. Jose Miguel Insulza, as well as the Assistant Secretary General Elect of this Organization, Ambassador Albert R. Ramdin.

I take this opportunity to extend my best wishes for a effective term in office to the new Secretary General of the OAS as well as the new Assistant Secretary General. The new

leadership of the OAS is indeed confronted with many urgent and structural problems, which need to be addressed as soon as possible.

Suriname is particularly proud to have received the full support of the Caribbean Community and that of many other nations in the hemisphere to have a Surinamese national occupy this important post. On behalf of the Government and People of Suriname, I thank you for this support.

With both elections CARICOM has demonstrated unity and strength, and one can wonder how much more can be realized to the benefit of our Community if we continue to demonstrate this kind of collectivism and solidarity.

In this regard, it is important to note the fruitful encounter we, colleague Heads, have had with the President of Brazil, His Excellency Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva during the Inter-Sessional in Paramaribo. The negotiations between Caricom and Mercosur are on-going, while other opportunities exist to collaborate with Brazil on strengthening our economies and policies.

Similarly, the CARICOM-India relations were enhanced by the first ministerial meeting to discuss the cooperation between India and CARICOM. The follow-up of these meetings will take place through the so-called joint-commissions, planned for later this year. The confirmation by the Indian Minister of State, His Excellency Rao Inderjit Singh, of the financing of the computerization of the new CARICOM Headquarters can be seen as a first step in the development of an intensive and long relationship.

This year the international community will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the United Nations. We all know that the aim of the United Nations was to create a strong concept of multilateralism in order to maintain international peace and security and to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and conflict. Regrettably, we must conclude that this ideal approach has been undermined by unilateralism. Contemporary international relations require a reformed and more effective UN. You will also agree that the Reform of the UN Security Council, in particular, is long overdue and one of the major challenges we are facing in the reform process. I look forward to the debate in developing a common position on this matter.

Distinguished Heads of Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to pay tribute to the departing President of the Inter-American Development Bank, Dr Enrique Iglesias. Mr. Iglesias, you have served our hemisphere, and especially our sub-region, with distinction and I salute you for your leadership. I wish you the very best in your new endeavours and look forward to a continued relationship.

Distinguished Colleagues,

The political developments and security situation in our sister nation Haiti remain of great concern. We observe with sadness an increase of political instability and deterioration of the security environment in the run up to municipal, legislative and Presidential elections.

We also observe that while pledges for financial and technical aid and assistance are made, the actual disbursement is slow, which raises questions about the real commitment of the international community to alleviate the social and economic suffering of the Haitian people.

The concerns about the slow pace of the registration process, and the impact of the on-going violence, increased kidnappings and other forms of oppression by unidentified groups, put in a certain perspective on the quality and as a consequence feasibility of upcoming elections.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me turn to a much more positive note.

This month will be 10 years that the Republic of Suriname is a full fledge member of the Caribbean Community.

When I signed the accession documents in July 1995, I, of course, did not anticipate that I would be standing here today to celebrate this important moment in Suriname's and CARICOM's history.

Suriname's entrance in the Caribbean Community was indeed a unique and important step in our foreign policy objective to intensify relations with the Caribbean nations, who had been long before engaged in an integration process.

In my view, it was also a unique and critical moment for the then completely English speaking Caribbean Community to embrace a sister nation, located in South America, and with a different political, legal, educational and linguistic heritage. This all happened in the spirit of the widening and deepening of the CARICOM integration movement.

We have, in my humble opinion, done well over the past decade in reaching out and coming together, even to the point that Surinamese nationals have been and are contributing to the work of the CARICOM Secretariat, even at very high levels. For that confidence we are thankful and it encourages us to continue in the same manner. The relations between the Surinamese business community and private sector in many CARICOM nations is increasing, and is no longer a one way street. We are delighted to see that many CARICOM brothers and sisters visit Suriname and appreciate the diversity we offer in many ways. The highlight of this engagement and embracement was indeed the hosting of CARIFESTA VII in August 2003.

Suriname has hosted many CARICOM Conferences and meetings over the past years. We have been proud to be your host at two inter-Sessional meetings in 1999 and 2005 and have chaired several of the Councils of Ministers.

We feel proud to have been the first CARICOM member to issue the Caribbean Community passport, and in my view this symbolizes the strong commitment of the Government and People of the Republic of Suriname as a member of CARICOM.

We are also pleased to function as a bridge in expanding the region's horizon in South America, as well as in South East Asia. As I have indicated before, I prefer to consider the new alliances as a vehicle for further strengthening of our political relations as well as generating further economic growth and accessing new markets.

All of these achievements bode well for a further growth of the integration of Suriname in the Caribbean Community.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to thank the current Chairman of the Conference, the Honorable Dr Kenny Anthony, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia for receiving us with so much warmth and hospitality, and wish him the very best during his term in office as CARICOM Chair.

I thank you.