

## **Patterson calls for a new Haiti at Public Education Forum in St. Lucia**

Former Jamaica Prime Minister and the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) Special Representative to Haiti, the Most Honourable Percival James Patterson said on Tuesday March 9, that the devastation caused by the recent earthquake in Haiti must be converted positively into an opportunity to build a new and sustainable economy and society capable of satisfying the country's goals and targets set for the new Millennium.

Mr Patterson who was on route to a meeting of the Intersessional Heads of Government for CARICOM in Dominica on Wednesday, was delivering a maiden address in his capacity as the Community's Representative to Haiti at a public education forum hosted by a newly formed coordinating committee of civil society representatives in Castries, St Lucia. The committee was formed to help ensure a more cohesive response to the national effort aimed at assisting the people of Haiti.

Mr Patterson praised the initiative noting that St Lucia and Dominica were uniquely poised to advance the rebuilding process in Haiti. He said that both countries had the strong bond of language and a shared colonial history that brings them closer to Haiti than most other countries of the sub-region. "This makes your nations ideally suited to assume a leadership role as CARICOM establishes its physical presence in Haiti to assist the redevelopment."

Mr Patterson said that the earthquake provides an opportunity for the full integration of Haiti into the Caribbean Community drawing on the best in its history and culture. He reminded the meeting that it was under his chairmanship in 1998 that CARICOM leaders decided to grant Haiti provisional membership and admitted her immediately to the Conference and all the Councils.

He noted that while Haiti had not yet subscribed to the regime for the CSME, President Preval himself had repeatedly indicated that Haiti's future model of development must be one consistent with that of integration into CARICOM. "Future policy and planning for the country must therefore take this into account and be geared towards helping it to become a full beneficial member of the CSME," he said. Mr Patterson further noted that the Community had to assist the country's economy to be assimilated into the regional economic integration.

The former Prime Minister however maintained throughout his address that while CARICOM was there to assist and advise, Haiti must be primarily responsible for its own development plan.

Regarding the way forward as supported by CARICOM, the country had already indicated an initial focus on agriculture, light manufacturing and services. Hence, the rebuilding of the economic and social infrastructure, including substantial housing, should be seen as an important part of the way forward given their potential employment capacity. In addition, tourism is seen as a key driver in the recovery process, given its linkages with agriculture, arts, crafts and culture.

Mr Patterson stressed the importance of planning small business development in the context of climate change, sustainability and the creativity of the Haitian people, utilizing the depth and diversity of the CARICOM cultural profile. In this regard he expressed the hope that the private sector of Haiti and its CARICOM arm should gear up and equip itself for much of the work.

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