

**BUILDING HEMISPHERIC CAPACITY
TO WEATHER OUR COMMON VULNERABILITY:
A LESSON FROM HAITI**

A D D R E S S B Y

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1. **SALUTATIONS AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

- Many thanks for your warm welcome
- I have been involved in this Conference at the Ministerial level from its inception
- As a veteran participant, I am entitled to commend you on a sign of mature realism on your decision to include the subject of the implications of shifts in Cuban economic policy to the rest of the Caribbean Basin.
- I congratulate you for sustaining a truly important platform in which to ventilate policies, explore options and identify proposals for growth and development in the region.

When I addressed the Plenary Luncheon of your 28th Conference in 2004, I never envisaged returning to speak with you four years after my retirement from public office.

Following the devastation wreaked by the January 12 earthquake, I could not decline the invitation of the Heads of the Caribbean Community to serve as their Special Representative for Haiti. It is in that capacity that I have been invited to address you today.

2. JANUARY 12 – THE MAGNITUDE OF THE DISASTER

The Response of the International Community to the devastation, one of the most catastrophic in recent memory, was immediate and considerate.

CARICOM was very quick to respond to the Haitian crisis and we were among the first on the ground. Haiti belongs to the CDEMA shield, and so from Jamaica, a CARICOM contingent provided more than 400 response personnel, including military and medical personnel and search and rescue teams. Key personnel delivered food, water and relief supplies within two days.

Jamaica made available its port facilities, both land and sea as a staging area for international support.

3. FROM EMERGENCY TO RECOVERY

Today's combined response is shifting from an emergency mode to recovery and reconstruction. The scale of the destruction and the international pledges of support create a unique opportunity – the opportunity to build a new Haiti, drawing on the best in its rich history and culture, but looking to the future.

Policy, planning and implementation of the Haitian government and the international community, is aimed towards creating that better and sustainable future for the Haitian people. This means, fundamentally that resources must be so deployed as to eventually fuel self-sustained economic growth and human development.

Action Plan

The Action Plan for national Recovery and Development of Haiti, which was prepared by Haiti, with the assistance of technical experts, was adopted at the United Nations as the framework for moving forward.

The Plan established a range of immediate and medium to longer-term priorities in the economic, social, institutional and infrastructural areas.

4. RESUMING ECONOMIC GROWTH FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Haiti was not always poor. It was once the Pearl of the Antilles – the richest slave colony in the Caribbean during the 18th Century. It was impoverished by global economic and political forces.

Since 2004 Haiti achieved five consecutive years of fragile but uncontested growth. Confidence was growing and concrete plans were in place to finally launch the Haitian economy out of its financial malaise and spur the Haitian people on the road to development, drawing them out of the pit of poverty and despair.

It was clearly moving in the right direction before the earthquake destroyed the country: killing over a quarter of a million people; injuring some 300,000; almost totally wiping out the infrastructure of the nation.

Its recovery from the catastrophic earthquake, still struggling to get off the ground, must entail a building of strong institutional capacity, particularly in areas of health, education, social services and public administration.

Social and Economic Development

The building of a new Haiti has to ensure a strong, competitive economy. A vital element will have to be the strengthening and upgrading of the role of the private sector. The public sector suffered massive losses – government buildings, schools, medical facilities and other crucial areas of governance. But 70% of the material losses were in the private sector – businesses, family houses and other forms of civil property.

The international community has conceptualized its support for Haiti in respect of social and economic development as to “jumpstart sustainable social and economic development through reconstruction, investment, employment and income generating infrastructure projects and by engaging the Diaspora in the medium and long-term.”

Haiti has chosen a path towards development through integration and collaboration with its Caribbean neighbours.

This represents the best chance of sheltering Haiti from the tendencies of isolation and escaping punitive measures which have dogged most of the country's history.

For its economic development, the Government of Haiti has chosen an initial focus on agriculture, light manufacturing and services. The rebuilding of the economic and social infrastructure, including substantial housing, should be seen as an important part of the strategy given its potential employment capacity.

The development has been conceived in the context of climate change, sustainability and the creativity of the Haitian people, utilizing the depth and diversity of the Caribbean's cultural profile.

At the heart of the strategy are the diversification of the economy and the creation of new centres or poles of development. Eight development zones have been identified to reduce the excessive congestion in Port-au-Prince.

These poles will require simultaneous, multi-sector planning – involving economic sectors such as agriculture; agro-industry; light manufacturing; energy; tourism; housing; social infrastructure and facilities for education and health, as well as cultural industries, sporting activities and transportation.

5. TOWARDS SINGLE MARKET ENTRY – CARICOM INVOLVEMENT

The current engagement of CARICOM in Haiti is more than a neighbourly and humanitarian response. It is also in discharge of our Treaty of obligations and driven by the reality that our newest but largest Member State has suffered a natural disaster of enormous dimensions. Indeed, but for a tragic twist on January 12, Haiti would presently be occupying the Chair of the Community by virtue of rotation.

Although not yet a member of the Caribbean Single Market, the President of Haiti has expressly ordered that the current and future policy planning for Haiti should enable it to satisfy the requirements for full and effective membership, so soon as possible.

Haiti has chosen a path towards development through integration and collaboration with its Caribbean neighbours.

6. **PRIVATE SECTOR – ROLE AND POTENTIAL**

There is no doubt that the plans for Haiti's reconstruction cannot succeed without the full and committed engagement of the private sector.

The Haitian private sector will have to be involved in order to ensure an acceptable level of domestic ownership. Adequate funding and access to export credit are essential for substantial private sector involvement.

There must be efficient space for Medium and Small Scale Enterprises to participate within the framework of a scale for massive redevelopment which has never been attempted before in the Caribbean Basin. The business plan has to take into account that many of the local investors lost much of their resources in the earthquake. Small and medium sized investors will require special support in undertaking "Frontier investments."

The Haitian Authorities will have to remove a number of legislative and bureaucratic encumbrances, including those which presently exist for the Haitian Diaspora, in order to create a friendly and welcome environment for all those who satisfy the test of "fit and proper investor."

As we move to create real alliances across language, cultural and social borders, the support, cooperation and involvement of private business in the entire hemisphere must be encouraged and made welcome.

The population of the region at home in the Basin are by some estimates equaled or exceeded by the numbers of our citizens, whether first, second or third generation, who live and work in North America.

Already there are groupings who are actively working in North America and the Caribbean to make this fusion of resources and ideas a reality. The OAS, has been very active and has held several consultations and conferences to inform its member states.

The Caribbean Research and Policy Centre, of which I am a member, has been working on creating a database to assist private business interests. The Inter-American Development Bank has been extremely helpful at many levels.

The resources, expertise and experience needed to invest in this new and brighter Haiti cannot come from any one source or from any single region.

Haiti's closest neighbours do have a special role to play in the process, but ultimate success cannot come without a truly global effort led by the nations of this hemisphere, including our friends in South America.

7. **CHOLERA OUTBREAK**

The situation in Haiti still remains unsettled. The issues relating to the recent political contests and the potential for violence were exacerbated by the recent outbreak of cholera with its toll of victims.

With the threats to health and security created by the Cholera outbreak, the situation is now far more complicated. Despite the best efforts of the U.N., OXFAM and private non-governmental medical agencies like "Doctors Without Borders", the Cholera epidemic could get worse before it is brought under final control. Delays in getting the outbreak under full control run the certainty of increasing deaths.

The epidemic has already become a Caribbean disaster. All parts of the Region are vulnerable. No part of the population has immunity against the disease and our Health Services have but little experience in dealing with it. The Bureau of COHSOD, which includes responsibility for health in the Community has already mapped out a CARICOM response to the epidemic.

The Community is already providing medical supplies and equipment to combat the disease. Further, CARICOM will be making available Doctors and other Trained Health Personnel to support the campaign in Haiti.

Once again, Jamaica will serve as a point of transshipment to channel the supplies and equipment to Haiti in the effort.

8. **WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

In your earlier sessions today, reports were presented on the Recovery and Rebuilding efforts so far. You have discussed the best practices through which the international Community and the private sector, working in tandem, can fuel economic growth to guarantee long-term success. The Action Plan provides the road map of the key

initiatives to be undertaken, but we will only know how to reach the destination if we take a time out now to ascertain exactly where we are on the journey.

The truth is that after more than ten months, we have barely got out of the starting blocks. We will have to quickly make up for lost time so that we are not still left in the gate when January 12, 2011 comes.

The mountains of rubble still exist; the plight of the victims without any sign of acceptable temporary shelter is worsening; the conditions for the spread of cholera and the threat of new epidemics become more frightening with each passing day. In short, there has been no abatement of the trauma and misery which the Haitian populace have suffered.

We have to take into account the draconian damage done to the entire State apparatus in Haiti, the collapse of the National Budget. We have to realize that it required more than a trickle of the finances pledged by the International Community to kick start the actual rehabilitation. Despite this, we cannot escape the conclusion that the pace of progress simply will not do. The enormous scope and complexity of the work to be undertaken during this initial 12 month phase demand that we find innovative approaches and early solutions.

Seven months have passed in the 18 month life of the IHRC which was established to coordinate the implementation of the Master Plan for Development. It has already approved 50 projects, but we are yet to see tangible results.

A meeting of the IHRC is due to take place on Tuesday, December 14, and the two Co-Chairs, who have been working diligently, intend to have us focus primarily on a number of strategic issues to expedite the reconstruction and recovery of Haiti in the coming months.

We have to make sure of timely delivery of those projects which alleviate the hurt of the people, that the pressing priorities are tackled immediately. We have to find an effective way to remove the rubble, to provide shelter, to stimulate employment, to ensure good public health, to put the education system on a sounder footing.

None of this can brook delay. It cannot be sidelined until the newly elected Government of Haiti assumes office in accordance with the Constitution and democratic will of the Haitian people. We have to make sure that the operational mechanisms and the machinery for orderly implementation are put in place before year end.

The people have shown exemplary patience so far and only decisive action and positive momentum can remove the danger of social unrest and the eruption of widespread disorder.

Meanwhile, I ask the International Investors and the Haitian/Caricom Business Community to be also mindful that during this period there are significant portions of Haiti which were not affected by the earthquake and are now ready for development - Agriculture, Tourism, Ports, Roads, the Power Sector, the Transportation Network, Housing. There is no need to wait and see.

Let us form a dynamic partnership so that come January 2011, there will be demonstrable signs of recovery and signals which herald the New Renaissance.

9. OUR SHARED VULNERABILITY

The earthquake of January 12 was along a fault line which extends from the Plantain Gardens River in Jamaica to Enriquillo Lake in the Dominican Republic portion of Hispaniola. The shores of Cuba, the Bahamas and Jamaica are washed by the Caribbean Sea.

The Caribbean Basin is one of the largest semi enclosed seas in the world, rimmed by some 23 sovereign states and over half as many non-independent entities controlled by four metropolitan states.

It is subject to a range of hazards including

- a) Geological hazards such as earthquakes, volcanoes, landslides and tsunamis;
- b) Weather related hazards such as hurricanes, tropical storms, floods, mudslides, droughts, fires and insect infestations;
- c) Hazards such as the possibilities of chemical and nuclear spills in a heavily trafficked sea – populated with exotic species of plants, animals and fish;
- d) trafficking in drugs, psychotropic substances and trading in small arms.

In addition, we are all vulnerable to the lurking dangers of climate change with the disastrous possibility of rising waters and endangered coastlines.

Within the last twenty years, the region has faced at least three threats from disastrous diseases – the Pink Mealy Bug, the Mad Cow Disease and the Foot and Mouth Disease.

We need to develop appropriate protocols and common approaches to deal with all kinds of epidemic and thereby minimize arbitrary actions by individual member states.

10. LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

There are several lessons to be learnt from the cataclysmic disaster Haiti suffered last January.

First, we must recognize that it is possible for one or several of our countries to be impacted by more than one hazard at the same time. Haiti has been hit by the earthquake, storm and flooding and the cholera epidemic. Other parts of the region have had to deal with hurricanes, storms, flooding, droughts and volcanoes.

As in the case of Haiti we are not well equipped to deal with multiple hazards simultaneously.

Second, the Basin countries, with few exceptions, deal with hazards in a post-disaster, emergency-response, and reconstruction framework.

We depend on voluntary international aid which is mobilized after the declaration of the emergency or disaster, and initial assessments.

This has delay factors for any amount above nationally agreed discretionary grants. Limited capacity exists for mobilizing emergency response, rescue and security personnel, but there are no overall coordinating arrangements.

Our preparation strategies should ensure several essentialities.

- We need to adopt and enforce proper building codes. The devastation would not have been as severe had there been appropriate building systems in place.
- We need to have a quick response disaster management plan in place which can be speedily activated and smoothly implemented.
- The heavy reliance on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to handle a massive response effort requiring total coordination is excessive and therefore inadequate to cope with a series of major disasters.
- We need to ensure that mechanisms are in place to deal with the rush of international assistance during the emergency phase, in order to avoid chaos.
- We need to establish effective communication systems, resistant to disasters and prepared to keep the population informed about steps being taken and what can be expected at every stage. This dialogue must be continuous and allow for feedback from the population.

- Environmental concerns must be addressed as a matter of national and regional priority.
- We must determine beforehand how to address the post emergency phase...quickly putting in place transition strategies which focus on key priority areas such as provision of temporary housing and the removal of debris and rubble.
- There has to be a common understanding between all players (the international development partners – multilaterals, bilaterals – NGOs and the Government bureaucracy) about the process going forward.
- The government has to be at the forefront of the process. Their stated priorities must be the priorities which are driving the process, but dialogue and consultation are key to success.

- The losses in Haiti were far more devastating than they need have been due to the over-centralisation of government infrastructure. Decentralization is no longer an option; it is an essential feature in protecting our nations.

11. BUILDING A SYSTEM FOR HEMISPHERIC RESPONSE

It is now self evident that we urgently need to develop the institutional machinery; the systems for a well coordinated response; the technical capacity and the financial resources which will enable the Hemisphere of the Americas to predict, to mitigate, to respond decisively when disasters and crises occur.

We have to establish mechanisms which can be triggered, as in Haiti, where the State's physical structures are destroyed, and where an already weak apparatus needs to be bolstered instantly.

The process of recovery will be severely retarded unless the Government has the requisite institutional capacity and the budgetary support required to keep the process moving.

The time has come when our Hemisphere Institutions – the OAS, the IADB and PAHO should be mandated to work with the appropriate regional groups and bodies, so as to guarantee the building of this hemispheric capacity to weather our common vulnerability.

12. CONCLUSION

34 years ago, the CCAA embarked on a mission to influence policy directions which would promote business within the Caribbean Basin. So much has changed since then – drastic changes on the global landscape which have made a profound impact on our own sub-region – the manifestation of globalization; the mergers of corporate conglomerates; shifts in the rules and patterns of international trade; the emergence of a new economic axis; the revolution in technology; the new paradigm of a knowledge economy.

You have devoted some consideration here to the economic outlook for our region two decades from now. May I dare to suggest that you do not overlook the potential which the realization of Haiti's dream to become an emerging economy by 2030 could make to those prospects.

As we pool our collective resources to overcome our shared vulnerability, we must harness that power to support Haiti. At the end of the day, it will be just us helping ourselves. We will build on the platform of our cultural diversity and creative skills a sub-region that will employ our resources of nature and our human capital to make this sub-region an oasis for peace and prosperity.

As was the case more than two centuries ago, Haiti can be a trailblazer in shaping our social and economic destiny. Let us forge an exciting and dynamic partnership to witness the second Renaissance which will inspire hope and ignite the flame to secure a better life for all the people who belong to the family of nations which inhabit the Caribbean archipelago.