

Haiti – The Renaissance to Come

Address by

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I want to first of all commend all present here today who have not forgotten your shared humanity, or the ethnic bonds which link you with the great people of Haiti; the first independent black nation in the Western Hemisphere.

I would like to preface my comments with a few remarks on the Haitian historical background, in order to more succinctly put in context my views on the recovery and its proposed development.

Historical Context

Haiti has been all too frequently portrayed as a failed state. The truth is that Haiti is a state that has been 'forced into failure'. More than two centuries ago, Haiti won a war of political independence against France by defeating the legendary army of Napoleon Bonaparte. It did the unthinkable by daring to establish an independent black nation state in the Middle of the New World, thereby unlocking the shackles of slavery.

For that victory, Haiti was made to pay a heavy price and to this day has never been forgiven by the colonial masters. As the result of its triumphant battle, all slave-based nations in the Americas began to fear that Haiti would serve as the model for similar uprisings all over the Hemisphere.

Some eventually compelled, albeit reluctantly, that democracy was inconsistent with slavery.

In a very real sense, all persons who belong to the African Diaspora owe their subsequent freedom to the ensuing wave of abolition and emancipation to the bravery, sacrifice, tactical acuity and determination of the Haitian people.

Unfortunately for Haiti, the direct result of their success was a concerted plan to undermine the liberty which Haiti had won by a strategy of international isolation and a virtual blockade of the emergent nation.

To maintain some semblance of peace, Haiti was coerced to pay reparations to France for just under 100 years. These extortions at today's rate of conversion would amount to billions of US dollars, without taking interest into account.

These payments reduced Haiti to near bankruptcy and deprived it of the revenue to build the social sectors and the physical infrastructure.

Haiti did not jump; it was pushed over the precipice.

Having suffered the ravages of these extortion payments, Haiti was in no position to create a truly modern state and offer its people the social benefits of its independence victory.

It was not until the first half of the decade of the 1950s, during a brief return to democracy, that major social reforms were reintroduced and Haiti for the first time reflected a potential for economic growth. General Paul Magliore led the country at that time and until December 1956, when he was forced to resign in response to a period of turmoil leading to the election of Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier.

His regime is regarded as one of the most repressive and corrupt of modern times. He maintained a stranglehold through the “Macorites”. Human rights and constitutional rules were abandoned on the altar of ideological rectitude. The rule of law was subverted by the practice of torture.

Revenues, loans and much of the money aid provided for Haiti ended up in the Swiss Bank accounts, or in the pockets of wealthy elite who supported Papa Doc and then “Baby” Doc. The development of the country was stymied. The social fabric was torn apart.

The agricultural sector was destroyed due to the imposition of duty free entry of foreign food into local markets. The Haitian farmer was driven out of business. Early in the 1970s, the country provided 90% of its food needs from internal production. Haiti was importing more than 42% of its food need by the end of the 20th century.

Its history of glorious struggle was in danger of becoming completely tarnished by a pattern of external dependence.

The chilling reality is that Haiti has been repeatedly denied the right and freedom to chart its own course.

Since the removal of Duvalier, Haiti’s attempts to build a constitutional democracy have been destabilized twice by the forced removal of President Jean Bertrand Aristide during legitimate terms in office.

Jean Bertrand Aristide working as a parish priest in an impoverished and embattled district of Port-au-Prince emerged as the spokesman of a growing popular movement against the series of military regimes that ruled Haiti after the collapse of the Duvalier dictatorship.

He was overthrown by military coup in September 1991 (just 7 months into his term of office) and returned to power in 1994, after the US intervened to restore democratic government.

Haiti's army of some 7000 soldiers absorbed 40% of the national budget. It served as an army of internal occupation without ever fighting an external enemy.

In 1996, at the end of his term, he was succeeded by his ally Rene Preval who became the first elected Haitian president to serve a full term.

Aristide won another landslide election victory in 2000, but the resistance of Haiti's small ruling elite eventually culminated in a second coup against him, on the night of February 28, 2004. Since then, he has been living in exile in South Africa.

Today, Haiti once more is led President Preval. Four years into his second term, and on the cusp of real growth and development, he is faced by the worst disaster in the nation's history.

Earthquake

The 7.0 magnitude earthquake which occurred on January 12 wrought havoc on Haiti of unprecedented proportions. It destroyed the capital Port-au-Prince.

Mortality statistics to date exceed 250,000 and may likely reach as high as 300,000.

Some 310,000 persons have been seriously injured among which is a high percentage of amputees.

It destroyed 99% of the state's physical structures. The national palace, the Hall of Justice, the Parliament, Inland Revenue Headquarters, 14 ministries and several police stations. This decimation of the governmental infrastructure compounded the already critical situation and crippled the ability of the government to function.

In addition, over 250,000 houses collapsed, leaving the population in a perilous state. 1.2 million persons are homeless and still living on the streets in public parks and vacant lots.

At least eight hospitals and other healthcare facilities were destroyed or damaged in and around Port-au-Prince, Leogane and Jacmel.

There is urgent need for proper water treatment, for vector control and for facilities for the proposal disposal of human body parts and medical biohazards. Medical services are still being provided outdoors in makeshift spaces as health facilities are overcrowded or have poor hygiene.

Schools, Universities and Hospitals have been demolished. Libraries, galleries, archives require urgent work if the rich cultural legacy of Haiti is to be preserved.

The Heads of our Caribbean Tertiary Institutions have met with the Principals of Universities from Haiti and are charting a course for immediate support; one which also laid the foundations for meaningful long term collaboration in the fields of scholarships, academic and student exchange.

The plight of poverty in Haiti existed long before the earthquake. It has been greatly exacerbated by disaster of cataclysmic proportion which has attracted an international spotlight that we cannot allow to disappear once the media frenzy recedes.

The devastation must be converted positively into an opportunity to build a new economy and society capable of satisfying the goals and targets set for the new Millennium.

CARICOM

In 1998 in Montego Bay, CARICOM leaders took the decision, under my Chairmanship, to grant Haiti provisional membership and admitted her immediately to the Conference and all the Councils.

By this decision, CARICOM sought to support the fragile democracy. Following the 1995 presidential election for the first time, a democratically elected President, Rene Preval, had succeeded another democratically elected President, Jean Bertrand Aristide. We sought to take Haiti out of isolation by making it a member of the Caribbean family.

President Preval himself has indicated and reiterated that Haiti's future model of development must be one consistent with that of full integration into CARICOM.

CARICOM has to assist the Haiti's economy to be assimilated into the regional economic integration and strengthen the country's capacity to participate meaningfully into activities and initiatives of CARICOM.

But Haiti must create their own development plan. CARICOM is there to offer technical assistance and advice; to lobby and work alongside Haiti, cognizant of the urgency, to meet their immediate need, according to their priorities and satisfy their long term interests.

Haitian Plan of Action

Tomorrow, there will be placed at the Donor's Conference, an action plan in the form of a Post Disastr Needs Assessment. This was prepared by the Haitian authorities in conjunction with various UN agencies, international financial institutions, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development (IADB) among others.

The needs identified are enormous. Haiti estimates that US\$11.5 billion are necessary to rebuild the country, with 50% of the estimated resources to go to social programmes, 17% to infrastructure and 15% to the environment and disaster management.

The actual losses from the catastrophe are estimated at US\$7.9 billion, representing 120% of Haitian GDP.

Governance and the State

The proper management of the disbursement of such a large sum will call for a tremendous exercise in governance by Haiti with the plan envisioning:

The decentralization of government, economic activity and other services to lessen the present over-concentration in the capital city.

The re-energizing of the agricultural sector to address food security and cut back on dependency on foreign food aid.

Port-Au-Prince is not only the capital of the country, but is the location where public administration, political, business cultural, and other activities are over-concentrated to the detriment of outside locations.

The State's human capital, its institutional and administrative capacity as well as its physical presence (the Presidential Palace, Ministries, Courts, Police Stations including the Headquarters) have been virtually wiped out by a single event. Every effort must therefore be made to strengthen this pulverized institutional capacity. The success or failure of the reconstruction efforts will depend on it. The public functions of the state and of its public service must be reinforced as a matter of priority to ensure that the progress made in the provision of public goods and basic services during this immediate post-disaster stage is adequate and sustainable.

If Haiti is to create a new, positive sense of the State and of Government, it will have to strengthen its institutional capacity and the public functions of the State and its public service will have to be reinforced as a matter of urgency.

Its revenues fell by 80% during January and February and is estimated to drop by 55-70% for the rest of the fiscal year. The Government will be unable to discharge its functions and responsibilities unless adequate budgetary support is forthcoming. This is also linked to the larger issue of governance: unless the citizens perceive its Government is responding to its needs, confidence will be eroded and the threat of social tension will heighten.

The administration of justice and the enhancement of public security demand urgent treatment especially to provide access to justice and security of the communities which have been severely affected. Children, women, the elderly and displaced persons require special consideration.

I must commend members of the Haitian Diaspora, who through your donations, advice, lobbying activities and actual service on the ground in Haiti, have signaled that you have not forsaken or forgotten your homeland and remain committed to a Haiti which can become a world model for development.

To achieve this new Haiti, governance will be of primary importance to the process, CARICOM is committed to assisting Haiti in the creation of a government of transparency, compassion, efficiency and vision in the wake of this disaster.

That vision must include as priorities:

- Improved standards of living and work**
- Full employment of labour and other factors of production**
- Accelerated, coordinated and sustained economic development and convergence**
- And the expansion of trade and economic relations with other states in the hemisphere, Europe and beyond.**

The provisions in the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas in relating to “establishment, services, capital and the movement of community nationals” are designed to create conditions and sufficient employment in Haiti and other parts of CARICOM which will remove the fear of being overrun by Haitian migrants.

Our countries all fall within the one million square mile region, known as the Caribbean sea. In some instances, less than 200 miles separate us from our closest neighbor. We share common vulnerabilities.

CARICOM is cognizant of the fact that a strong Caribbean Community needs a strong Haiti to assume a position of leadership.

Geographically, CARICOM member, Jamaica shares a sea border, the Mona Passage with Haiti. The Bahamas is one of Haiti’s closest neighbours and hosts a large Haitian population. The long term political stability of Haiti is in the best interests of the Caribbean Community, since social and economic unrest in Haiti generates tension and instability in the entire region.

We are obliged to respond, not simply because of our common humanity, but because one of our own is suffering from a natural disaster of incalculable dimensions.

No longer can we regard Haiti and our community of countries as a “them and us” situation. Today, we have moved beyond that into making them finally and forever one of us.

We intend to do so in a timeframe and fashion which enures to the strengthening of our Community with its growth and development in our most populous member state.

Response to Date

We have provided more than 400 response personnel, including military and medical personnel and search and rescue teams. We had key personnel delivering food, water and other supplies on the ground within two days.

The Government of Jamaica offered its port facilities, both land and sea without charge as the staging area for international assistance.

We were able to make an immediate and meaningful response in the face of a grave crisis.

Help was forthcoming in cash and kind from all over the Caribbean. Governments, Private Sectors, Churches, Entertainers, Civil Society. The willingness of our people, even those of limited means themselves, to help our brothers and sisters in distress was great and unmistakable.

Role of the Special Representative

As CARICOM's Special Representative, I have been given three primary responsibilities:

- To engage with the international community as a key CARICOM advocate on behalf of Haiti

- Facilitating the preparation of proposals for the Community's medium and long term assistance for Haiti's recovery, reconstruction and development for the consideration of Heads of Government; and

- Ensuring the continued interface between the Community and the Government of Haiti, with regard to Haiti's recovery, reconstruction and development assistance.

Having regard to the plethora of international conferences taking place on Haiti, we can give considerable support by participating with international partners, bilateral and multilateral agencies and organizations, in all efforts aimed at developing and adopting strategic policy and programming frameworks for more efficient and effective coordination of assistance. This must be based on the priorities established by the Government of Haiti.

CARICOM's Response

CARICOM is no longer just another Regional Group. It is a community of 14 sovereign nations, with Haiti as its most recent and populous member state.

The international community has conceptualized its support in response of social and economic development through reconstruction, investment, employment and income generation.

Policy planning and implementation strategies must be focused towards creating that attainable better and sustainable future for Haiti and the Haitian people.

This means, fundamentally that resources must be so deployed as to create and sustain economic in Haiti. This challenge is not insurmountable. It represents the only chance of sheltering the country from the danger of isolation or the imposition of initiatives which deny Haitian ownership.

The aim is to jumpstart sustainable social and economic development with the support of infrastructure project that trigger growth, create jobs and engender the building of social capital.

In response to the earthquake and the challenge to its own capacity, Haiti has requested that CARICOM provide full support in its interfacing with the international community. The capacity of CARICOM is being seen by Haiti as part of its own national capacity.

In accepting this responsibility, CARICOM recognizes that Haiti knows its needs best.

CARICOM regards the rebuilding and strengthening of institutional and technical capacity as an area where we can make a meaningful difference.

We intend to make available our capacities in administrative reform; in education and training, including vocational education and certification; in engineering and construction for earthquake and hurricane resistance, in providing solutions for low and middle income populations; in agriculture and tourism research and development.

The fact of Haiti's previous involvement in CARICOM institutions, its geographic proximity and similarity of critical conditions, will enhance relevance; reduce the learning curve and thereby avoid costly errors.

Communications & the Media

We have to tell the true story to the entire world – about Haiti, its history, its encounters, its political and natural disasters – its potential, its prospects, its creative strengths.

You, through the media, publications in the national press throughout Canada and the USA can greatly assist in correcting the myths which now abound.

Those who hold political office can be an effective voice in mobilizing programmes and financial flows for Haiti.

The Way Forward

In terms of its economic development, the Government of Haiti sees 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.

Tourism

The Haitian authorities have identified this sector as a key driver in the recovery process, given its linkages with agriculture, arts, crafts and culture. The tourism areas of the island are pretty much intact, and have already been brought back on stream. Discussions are already taking place with the Caribbean tourism Organization (CTO) under the Montego Bay Initiative to establish what role a regional destination marketing plan could serve in the promotion of Haitian tourism.

Agriculture

Last year agriculture grew by 29%. Haiti had to be careful that donations of food, though necessary and welcome in the emergency did not expose Haiti to becoming dependent again on imported food at the expense of local agriculture. It is imperative that efforts are made to improve the conditions of life for those who had fled from Port-au-Prince to the country side to prevent a drift back to the capital.

This will provide direct employment for a number of persons. This apparel sector, which was fairly well established, has traditionally been a large employer of women, the backbone of Caribbean economies.

Development of Small Business

This will be especially good for employment generation, engendering creative skills, increasing self employment and promoting self reliance.

It will be important also to plan the 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.

Equally important is that our educational and training institutions gear themselves to accept Haitian students and to train an increasing number of other CARICOM nationals in French.

An entire society has been totally traumatized so our efforts must extend beyond a repair of the physical and economic infrastructure to address the psychological impact which the disaster has caused. Those who have the competence and specialized experience can make an immense contribution to the recovery process.

International support is essential in pushing Haiti forward on a path to real development, but the Government and people of Haiti should be the major protagonist of the reconstruction of our country and their collective destiny. The long history of interventions and external aid in Haiti has not resulted in advancing the welfare of its people. What has never worked well should not be repeated.

The international community at the meeting in Montreal recognized the need to respect Haiti's sovereignty and the need for its citizens to own the process.

This requires the involvement of not only the state apparatus, but a broad participation of the people in the course of decision making. CARICOM will be responding to the imperative of repairing what was admittedly a weak structure of governance by helping to build an institutional framework, anchored in accordance with its laws and constitution – adequately staffed and readily accountable.

The Haitian Diaspora has expressed an eagerness to play its part and the wider Caribbean Diaspora has also signaled its readiness to get involved in strengthening a pulverized institutional capacity.

Donors

The New York meeting of donor groups is absolutely essential to defining the way forward and how the process of rebuilding will be achieved. It provides an excellent opportunity for the international community to put into practice some of the principles it has been advocating recently to enhance "Aid Effectiveness" such as national leadership and responsibility of the State; response to local needs and knowledge; reduction in conditional ties including tying and shifting from pre conditions to

management through the setting of targets and monitoring of performance by all partners; partnerships; sufficiency and sustainability and timeliness; and national capacity building and strengthening.

The establishment of the Multi-Donor Trust Fund is a very positive initiative that CARICOM welcomes. All donors must now commit to the MDTF and its joint management.

The arrangements for the fund and more generally for support to Haiti, must facilitate, encourage and recognize this collaborative approach. Tomorrow's donors and donations, big and small, in kind or in cash are important.

But we must be wary that, with the gradual withdrawal of the Haitian story from the front pages of major international media, the enthusiasm of donors and facilitators does not weaken and or dissipate, nor the will to assist in the redevelopment of the country become mere lip service. The actions of the donor groups at this historic meeting can go a far way in sending a signal that the international community will partner Haiti in this endeavour all the way to the very end. Nothing less than a revitalized Haiti, that is sustainable, just and equitable, will be acceptable as a measure of success. The consensus is clear on the imperative to build a new Haiti – to create a Haitian renaissance.

The challenge to the international donor conference is to create that blueprint, that action plan and organizational arrangement to assure maximum effectiveness of all resources to facilitate the reconstruction of Haiti.

CARICOM attaches great importance to this as, in time, the effectiveness, or lack of effectiveness in the management of the “AID” resources to Haiti will be seen as the effectiveness or otherwise of the use of aid resources in the Caribbean.

Conclusion

I could not end without paying a well deserved tribute to the Haitian people for the bravery and heroism displayed by ordinary people in dealing with adversities beyond description.

We were especially impressed by the level of support they gave each other in their darkest hour. We have all witnessed the energy, resolve and spirit of community that must now be further harnessed in the way forward. The ordinary people, the men, women and children have responded with fortitude, dignity and grace³ which make us proud.

I am of the view, shared by many, that after years of exploitation and abuse, the time has come to repay the people of Haiti for their pain and their sacrifice. They have throughout the ages demonstrated an extraordinary capacity in the face of disasters, be they natural or man-made.

Mother Nature has spoken loud and clear – rebuilding cannot mean a return to Haiti which existed on the morning of January 1. We must build a new and better Haiti.

We have been summoned to the creation of a new Haiti, which is sustainable, just and equitable... a new Haiti which is able to meet the dreams and aspirations of all its people – a Haitian renaissance which fulfils the vision of those who fought and died to win their freedom and who opened the doors of liberty and justice for all who believe in the equality of the whole human race.