

The Way Forward in the Reconstruction of Haiti

Address by
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Salutations

I want first of all to commend this umbrella committee that has been established to coordinate the civil response in St Lucia to Haiti's devastating earthquake. I also applaud the supportive public education programme you have launched and which affords me this forum to share my perspectives on the disaster and the rebuilding process.

I note that you have also invited Sir Hillary Beckles who has published extensively on Haiti's history. Given Sir Hillary's erudition and focus on the subject, his presentation should have preceded mine. Be that as it may your letter of invitation indicated that there are many misconceptions on Haiti which need to be removed. I am therefore obliged to begin with a historical context in order to express my views "on the way forward".

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 defeating the legendary army of Napoleon Bonaparte. It did the unthinkable by establishing an independent and democratic black nation state in the middle of the new world. 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 this great victory 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 were eventually forced to accept that democracy was inconsistent with slavery.

In a very real sense, all persons in the African diaspora, owe their subsequent freedom, in the ensuing wave of national abolitions of slavery, to the bravery, sacrifice, tactical acuity and determination of the Haitian people.

Unfortunately for Haiti, the direct result of this victory was a concerted plan to undermine the Haitian victory by a strategy of international isolation and a virtual trade blockade of the emergent nation.

In the end, Haiti was forced to pay reparation to France for just under 100 years. These extortions at today's rate of conversion would amount to billions of US Dollars without interest. 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.

During the first half of the decade of the 50s by all indications Haiti, in a brief return to democracy, introduced major social reforms and reflected a potential for economic growth. General Paul Magloire led the country until December 1956, when he was forced to resign in response to a period of turmoil leading to the election of Francois Duvalier. His regime is regarded as one of the most repressive and corrupt of modern times. He maintained a stranglehold through the "Maconites". The western powers condoned his atrocities since he, like so many military dictators in the Americas, was an avowed pawn in the war against Communism. Human rights and constitutional rules were made subordinate to ideological rectitude.

Revenues, loans and much of the monetary aid provided for Haiti ended in Swiss Bank accounts, or in the pockets of wealthy elite who supported Papa and Baby Doc. The development of the country was stymied. The social fabric was torn apart. The rule of law was subverted by the practice of torture.

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 1970's, the country provided 90% of its food needs from internal production. As Dr. Alex Dupuy, Distinguished Professor of sociology at Wesleyan University in the US notes, it was importing more than 42 percent of its food needs by the end of the 20th century.

Haiti became the highest per capita consumer of subsidized US imported rice in the Western Hemisphere, and the largest importer of foodstuffs from the US in the Caribbean. Its history of glorious struggle was in danger of becoming forever 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 destabilised twice by the removal of President Aristide during legitimate terms in office.

In the past two years, Haiti has been engaged with Partners from the International Community to prepare a bold new plan for development. It now has to cope with an earthquake disaster whose magnitude of damage is yet to be finally calculated.

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.

Schools, Universities and Hospitals have been demolished. Libraries, Galleries, Archives require urgent work if the rich cultural legacy of Haiti is to be preserved. Next Monday, the Heads of our Caribbean Tertiary Institutions will meet with the Principals of Universities from Haiti to chart a course for immediate support and to lay the foundations for meaningful long term collaboration in the fields of scholarships, academic and student exchange.

What we know for certain is that the earthquake ranks within living memory among the worst catastrophes in a single nation; worse than the Asian Tsunami which struck Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India.

The plight of poverty in Haiti existed long before the earthquake. It has been greatly exacerbated by a 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 at 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 took Haiti out of isolation and made it a member of the Caribbean family.

Since becoming a full member of the Community, Haiti has not yet subscribed to the regime for the CSME. President Preval himself has indicated and reiterated 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. It has to assist the country's economy to be assimilated into the regional economic integration.

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 needs, according to their priorities and satisfy their long term interests.

These include:

- Improved standards of living and work
- Full employment of labour and other factor 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.

These conditions have to be created in Haiti for the country and the Community to meet the fundamental requirements of the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas.

By seeking to satisfy the provisions relating to “establishment, services, capital and the movement of community nationals which will create conditions and sufficient employment in Haiti and other parts of CARICOM that remove the fear of being overrun by Haitian migrants.

In order to do this, Haiti needs the full cooperation of CARICOM countries. 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 neighbour. We share common vulnerabilities.

We are therefore obliged to respond, not simply because of our common humanity; 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 should do so in a time frame and fashion which enures to the strengthening of our Community with its growth and development in our most populous member state.

Role of the Special Representative

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

1. To engage with the international community as a key CARICOM advocate on behalf of Haiti.
2. 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
3. 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 based on the priorities of the Government of Haiti.

My responsibility will be to work closely with the Haitian authorities in ensuring that the selection of a development strategy takes into account their own priorities and are compatible with the upcoming integration of Haiti into the CSME. A special unit has been established within the Secretariat in Guyana. The CARICOM Office in Haiti will be refocused to act as a liaison on the ground with the Haitian authorities.

CARICOM's Response

Haiti itself has chosen a path towards development through integration and collaboration with its Caribbean neighbours. The CARICOM family must therefore respond by being there for Haiti. CARICOM is no longer another Regional Grouping. It is a Community of 14 sovereign nations, with Haiti as its most recent member. CARICOM must be the column for the steering wheel, with Haiti in the driving seat. We cannot abdicate our responsibility to our kith and kin

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

Policy, planning and implementation strategies by the Haitian government and the international community, including the private sector, 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 to create and sustain economic activities 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.

Our 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.

Health

Drawing on the priorities identified by the Government of Haiti, CARICOM has identified health as its main area of focus.

At least eight hospitals and other healthcare facilities were destroyed or damaged in and around Port-Au-Prince, Leogane and Jacmel. There is an urgent need for proper water treatment, for vector control and for facilities for the proper 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.

Until very recently CARICOM countries were engaged in sending out health teams to different locations in Haiti.

Based on an on-the-ground assessment and in consultation with the Government of Haiti, it was agreed that the CARICOM health initiative would seek to foster partnerships with agencies working in one concentrated area to better facilitate the delivery of tangible and timely assistance.

That area has been designated as Leogane, located some 40 miles from Port-Au-Prince. Leogane has a population of approximately 134,000 and was especially gravely affected by the earthquake with 94% of the buildings destroyed.

We now have a mobile unit which will operate in the Leogane area. Currently everything is being moved there for future action covering a range of treatment and care activities.

In a declaration from a summit of Heads of State of Mexico and CARICOM member states on February 21, a commitment was made to give the highest joint priority to strengthening the aid and reconstruction effort particularly

with regard to health in the emergency and post emergency stage.

Communications & Media

As we move from the stage of rescue and emergency response to recovery and reconstruction, communication has a critical role to play. We have to ensure that the people of the Caribbean are informed of what is being done by Regional Bodies and what they can contribute in the medium and long term.

Traditionally the media, especially radio, have greatly influenced the lives of the 9 million Haitians who are mostly unschooled, and the media's role in moving the nation forward remains crucial.

Several media houses in Port-Au-Prince and provincial towns, which were severely affected by the earthquake are endeavouring to rise from the rubble.

The challenge is compound by the threat of the approaching hurricane season. Forecasts communicated through the media for example, can make the difference between life and death for persons who may be faced with the disaster of a hurricane or a tropical storm.

We confidently expect that other Caribbean and international media will offer media entities in Haiti as much support as possible to facilitate the speedy resumption of all media services.

Response to Date

The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency was early on the scene, leading the emergency response on our behalf.

Led by personnel from the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) a CARICOM contingent based in Port-Au-Prince was established.

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. Heads of Government and other CARICOM representatives visited within the first five days.

As small as our economies are and although our resources may be limited, tons of emergency supplies were routed through Jamaica. We were able to make an immediate and meaningful response in the face of a grave crisis. The Government of Jamaica offered its port facilities both land and sea, as a staging area for international assistance

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.

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 Minister of Tourism, speaking in Kingston recently, stressed that the tourism areas of the island are pretty much intact, and within minimum effort and resources can be brought back on stream in a short time. Discussions are already taking place with the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) under the Montego Bay Accord to establish what role a regional

destination marketing plan could serve in the promotion of Haitian tourism.

Agriculture:

Is a large employer of labour. Last year agriculture grew by 29%. Large percentages of persons have moved out of Port-Au-Prince and have gone to the rural areas. It is imperative that efforts are made to improve the conditions of life for those who had fled to the countryside to prevent a drift back to the capital. 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.

Light Manufacturing

His will provide direct employment for a number of persons. The 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.

The private sector of Haiti and by extension its CARICOM arm should gear up and equip itself for much of the work.

Provisions exist under the CARICOM Agreement and the Economic Partnership Agreement with the European Union which allows cumulation. Inputs and supplies from within the CSME may be treated as local companies throughout the Region, organizing themselves to submit joint bids.

We also need to develop inventories of the capabilities of various companies in the region, so that Teams can be easily structured through access to the relevant data banks, such as National Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Services Coalitions and Professional Groupings, possibly coordinated by the Caribbean Associations of Industry and Commerce (CAIC), which would be in the best position to coordinate that effort.

In organizing the inventories of capacities, efforts should be made to include technicians and craftsmen such as Carpenters, Masons, Plumbers and experienced labourers and crafts persons. Those with capabilities in Creole would enjoy a great advantage.

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.

The countries of St. Lucia and Dominica are uniquely poised to advance the process. Both here and in Dominica you have the strong bond of language and a shared colonial history that brings St. Lucia and Dominica closer to Haiti than most other countries in the sub region. This makes your nations ideally suited to assume a leadership role as CARICOM establishes its physical presence in Haiti to assist in the redevelopment.

Having said that, I want to applaud the proposed involvement of your Committee here in St. Lucia to focus on the special needs of the often overlooked disabled community.

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.

There is no doubt the importance of international support is pushing forward on a path to real development. But let me reiterate that it is the Haitians who should determine the needs and define what assistance should ideally be provided.

CARICOM is already working on some basic principles, which we believe must form the basis for the formulation of any plan. Central to this, is the view that the government and people of Haiti are, and should continue to be, the major protagonist of the reconstruction of their 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, and 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 laudable goal cannot be realized by lip service.

It 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.

In order for the key institutions to perform their role in implementation, CARICOM will have to help in providing additional levels of professional support.

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.

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 grace which make us very proud of their kindred.

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 that Haiti which existed on the morning of January 11. 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 door of liberty and justice for all who believe in the equality of the whole human race.