"THE RENAISSANCE OF HAITI: A TEMPLATE FOR CARIBBEAN INTEGRATION"

TWELFTH ANNUAL DR. ERIC WILLIAMS MEMORIAL LECTURE

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Let me at the outset confess that by listing the formidable array of previous distinguished Presenters and the further indication in the letter from the Florida International University that this Lecture Series was intended to be “a purely scholarly evening of thoughtful analysis on current topics of interest”, were sufficient causes of intimidation to prevent an immediate acceptance of your kind invitation. Despite this there were compelling reasons why I eventually capitulated.

Firstly, I regard this invitation as a personal honour as we celebrate the life and work of an intellectual giant and an outstanding leader of the Caribbean, Dr. Eric Williams.

I had the privilege of presenting, more than four and a half years ago, The 20th Eric Williams Memorial Lecture in Trinidad and Tobago. That I believe makes me the first person to have taken the “twin double”.

I still regard as one of the highlights in my own life, the fortune of inviting to the Mona Campus, Dr. Eric Williams and presiding over the Lecture he gave there in 1955.

I cannot forget his spellbinding oratory which captivated a grossly overflowing audience of students and lecturers without the benefit of a single note.

It was during that Mona Lecture, Dr. Williams first announced on Regional Caribbean soil his intention to return home and launch the People’s National Movement (PNM).

From the University of the West Indies, he moved to the University of Woodford Square, where he innovatively and ingenuously treated the masses to higher education, free of charge.

Secondly, there can be no doubt that the magnitude of the disaster which befell the nation of Haiti nine months ago, is one which demands dialogue of the kind in which we seek to engage today. How do we react to the plight of a nation which heroically freed itself from the shackles of slavery and the yoke of colonialism more than two centuries ago?

It is fitting that the theme of this evening's event is the reconstruction that is taking place in Haiti. As a quintessential Caribbean man, Dr. Williams would have readily recognized the profound opportunity it offers to change inexorably the equation for the integration of the wider Caribbean.

THE OWNERSHIP

The January 12, 2010 devastating earthquake in Haiti plunged the Caribbean – if not the entire world – into a state of despair exceeded only by the trauma felt by the people of Haiti themselves. While the global community commendably rallied to Haiti's aid, the overarching regional and global sentiment nevertheless seemed to be, "here we go again", confronted with Haiti's insurmountable problems. The location of Haiti within a discourse of "the problematic Black Caribbean" masks a historical truth – that Haiti was a symbol of black liberation: a rich nation that developed France, but one made impoverished by global economic and political forces.

At the Meeting in Montreal, last January, I spoke as Special Representative of CARICOM on moving beyond "rehabilitation from the catastrophic earthquake" to the imperative of "building a new Haiti – a renaissance."

Now, everyone is talking about how to rebuild Haitians' shattered lives and doing so within the context of a "Haitian Renaissance".

An overarching sentiment, expressed over and over again is that as Haiti tries to recover from the catastrophic earthquake of January 12, 2010, nothing short of rebirth, rejuvenation, redevelopment, physical reconfiguration will be acceptable.

Several world leaders have spoken in terms of finally changing the fortunes of Haiti. Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorin called the post January period a chance for Haiti's "second independence". Ban Ki Moon spoke of "wholesale national renewal...a sweeping exercise in nation-building on a scale and scope not seen in generations."

But I often wonder: what do those who speak of a "Renaissance" mean by it? I suspect that the term means different things to different people. Obviously, no one means a cultural renaissance of the type, that took place in Europe from the 14th to the 17th century.

Haiti still remains world renowned for its culture, art and music which has grown stronger over the ages and has outlived the impact of severe natural disasters.

For some it means an architectural/infrastructural renaissance – a rebuilding of destroyed buildings, including the Presidential Palace and the Cathedral; the removal of shanty towns; for others it is the creation of “order” out of what they interpret as chaos.

Others talk in terms of a regeneration, a rebirth of democracy, peace and security; an absence of dictatorship; a return to dignity and respect for human life.

For us in the Caribbean and the Haitian Diaspora, what is needed, first and foremost, is a rebirth of hope and self-confidence among Haitians, grounded in firm historical evidence of a strong and resilient people who threw off the French colonial yoke; who defeated the mighty forces of Napoleon to cement their place in history as the first free Black Republic, trodding an alternative socio-political and economic path.

It means a rebuilding of institutions of health, education and social services; the building of a strong, competitive economy; a revitalized Haiti that is sustainable, just and equitable.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As brilliant an historian as he was, Dr. Williams would have insisted on grounding this Lecture by a quick reminder of what Haiti taught the world.

Let us share a short reminder about what Haiti achieved historically. On the night of August 22, 1791, the enslaved in Haiti, led by Jamaican-born Boukman Dutty, embarked on one of the greatest revolutions in world history. He was joined by rebel leaders from the plantations throughout the central parts of the Northern area.

At first, Toussaint L'Ouverture who worked as a coachman for the manager on the Breda plantation, kept in touch from his home with Boukman, Jean-Francois and Bissou.

Boukman was killed early in the revolution; but Toussaint L'Ouverture and able leaders like Dessalines and Christophe succeeded him and led the enslaved people to victory.

By 25th August over a hundred sugar properties had been destroyed and by the 30th this number had risen to over 200.

By the end of 1798, they had defeated the English who were preparing to withdraw. The Spanish had withdrawn earlier. But the French would not give up. When the French tried to restore slavery, the black and coloured worked together to resist the invaders. With Toussaint removed from the scene, the leadership fell to Dessalines.

Napoleon sent 40,000 troops into the colony but they failed to regain effective control. By May 1803, they were retreating, beaten and disgraced by the black and coloured soldiers. The Europeans were driven out of the country, slavery was not restored, and the 'natives' were back in full command.

Freedom by determined black people in one part of the Americas inspired a whole continent to armed struggle.

When Napoleon's troops and those of the English and Spanish which had the same mission were eventually defeated by the emancipated Blacks, they became free citizens as the Independent State of Haiti was proclaimed on January 1, 1804.

PEARL OF THE ANTILLES

The world should remember that Haitians were not always poor – people to be rescued. In the age of mercantilism (the first phase of globalization), Haitian commodity production and the compensation extracted from the country in 1825, enriched the coffers of France and allowed it to become a world power. Haiti was France's Pearl of the Antilles – the richest slave colony in the Caribbean in the 18th century. St. Domingue's wealth was important to economic and social development of France. It made up about 35% of France's foreign trade; it provided the French upper classes with tropical goods and offered everyone cheaper sugar and coffee.

Haiti was not just content to cement its own freedom from slavery and colonialism in 1804. The passing of emancipation legislation and the consolidation of freedom within the constitution sent shock waves across the various slave regimes.

The revolution may have delayed the abolition of the slave trade and slavery in some places. Planters, fearful of losing their bases of power and wealth, tightened their hold on the colonies, even capitalizing on the gap in the world sugar market created by Haitian cessation of sugar cultivation. But equally, the Haitian Revolution was a spark which inspired others to intensify their fight for freedom.

It is clear, that the slave revolution, which over two hundred years ago created the state of Haiti, alarmed and excited public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic.

Its repercussions ranged from the council chambers of the great powers to slave quarters in Virginia and Brazil and most points in between; from the world commodity markets to the imagination of poets.

When Toussaint L'Ouverture lay imprisoned in a dungeon, William Wordsworth, the great English Romantic Poet implored him to:

> Live and take comfort. Thou has left behind
> Powers that will work for thee; air, earth and skies;
> There's not a breathing of the common wind
> That will forget thee; thou has great allies;
> Thy friends are exultations, agonies
> And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

Haiti's fifteen-year struggle for racial equality, slave emancipation, and national independence challenged notions about racial hierarchy that were gaining legitimacy in an Atlantic world dominated by European and the slave trade.

NO MORE ISOLATION

Leaders in the countries of the Caribbean who fought against the oppressive system of slavery were not only inspired by Haiti, but were often provided with logistical and military support as well.

Haiti's inspiration and support were not limited to the Caribbean islands. The great Simon Bolivar launched his campaign against Spain for the independence of Venezuela and other Spanish colonies on the mainland of South America from Haiti. The support he received under Alexander Petion's presidency was on the understanding that the slaves in Venezuela would be set free.

Haiti, for its inspiration and support to the struggle for independence of other countries in the hemisphere, was rewarded by imperial powers with a vicious plan and punitive strategy of international isolation and trade blockade.

Haiti rescued boat people, granted Haitian citizenship to fugitives from slavery and inspired other emancipation movements in the Hemispherre. And yet Haiti enjoyed no other circle of belonging – no French Caribbean circle; no French Commonwealth; no natural "mother" or siblings.

How can we ever repay that debt?

Only one way - By bringing Haiti into the family to which it belongs.

Haiti and CARICOM States share a relatively small geographic space – The Caribbean Sea. Haiti is Jamaica's second closest neighbour, sharing a sea border – the Mona Passage. It is also one of the Bahamas' closest neighbours. We share common vulnerability to the ravages of nature.

Instability in Haiti spells instability for the Caribbean. Social and economic unrest in Haiti spells trouble for the entire Region.

We have no choice now. We stand or fall together as a Caribbean.

As we bring Haiti out of that state of international isolation, we are determined to build a circle of hope and strength around our oldest Nation State.

In 1997 at Montego Bay, CARICOM Heads of Government admitted Haiti to the Conference of Heads of Government – the highest decision-making body – and all the policy-making Councils. This was our way to support the fragile democracy in Haiti following the 1995 election, when a democratically elected President Rene Preval succeeded the democratically elected President Jean Bertrand Aristide. It was the first time such a succession had the power of democratic legitimacy.

The various activities of CARICOM in dealing with the aftermath of the January earthquake are not just a matter of historical sentiment or an opportune humanitarian response. They are an imperative arising from the current mutual reality that Haiti is now a member of the CARICOM family.

We are spurred to action, because the newest but largest Member State has suffered a natural disaster of enormous dimensions.

ACTION PLAN

Haiti requires and deserves unprecedented levels of support from the international community – but it must remain a cardinal feature along the pathway to development for the Government and people of Haiti to be the major protagonist in the process of reconstruction.

The long history of interventions and failed programmes of external policies imposed on Haiti have only served to stultify progress in Haiti.

The recovery process must be driven by Haiti and permit ownership by the people.

The Action Plan for Haiti's National Recovery and Development which was prepared by Haiti, with the assistance of technical experts has been formally adopted by the international community six months ago as the framework for moving forward.

The Plan has identified four broad priority areas for focus, namely –

(i) Territorial rebuilding – This includes identifying, planning and managing new development centres

(ii) Economic rebuilding – Aimed at modernizing the components of the Agricultural Sector, developing a professional Construction Sector, Manufacturing, Small Industries

(iii) Social rebuilding – Embracing health, education and other related areas.

(iv) Institutional rebuilding – This includes the building of governance and democratic structures, legal and regulatory frameworks; and the transparency management and accountability structures. Over eighty per cent (80%) of the administrative buildings were destroyed. The loss of human capital has served to further erode pulverized institutional capacity.

There are two distinct features in the Action Plan which directly affect the CSME and a wider integration process.

> It is the first time that any Member State has committed itself to such a long term framework and received International endorsement and approval for an adequate level of resources to facilitate the early years of the process.
>
> It is also the first time that a Member State has determined that the Planning of its development must be within the framework of The Integration Process, and thereby enable its effective participation in the CSME.

The scale and scope of the Reconstruction and Development effort are huge. This allows the Community, and indeed the wider Caribbean, to collaborate and cooperate in a range of areas.

It also allows for planning and execution in a manner which can be impactful and visible for the Haitian people to realise the real benefit of regional cooperation.

At the heart of the strategy is the diversification of the economy and the relocation of the population away from Metropolitan Port-au-Prince, through the creation of new centres or poles of development. Eight development zones have been identified.

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 and sporting; and transportation.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

The Action Plan for National Recovery and Development requires a tremendous exercise in governance; the decentralization of government and the creation of a dynamic state which engages all strata within the society to command the full confidence of the populace.

The State must be put in a position to pass and monitor the laws, norms and regulations required that will ensure transparency and accountability in the use of resources. It must be able to put in place the requisite legal, regulatory and other frameworks necessary for the private sector to play its catalytic role.

To achieve this, the institutional capacity of the State must be strengthened. A weak bureaucracy will frustrate the entire rebuilding exercise and the reconstruction efforts will surely fail.

The capacity of CARICOM has to be seen as part of Haiti's own national capacity.

As a region, we have the skills, the talent and relevant experience which we are confident can make a positive difference in the rebuilding process. We are adequately geared to share competent staff in such areas as public sector management, financial controls and accountability, establishment of standards, building codes, land reform, security enhancement and the dissemination of information to the citizenry.

In accordance with a mandate from CARICOM Heads in July, the Government of Haiti has requested both the CARICOM Secretariat and the CDB to dedicate adequate resources to the rebuilding and strengthening of its institutional and human capacity. They have already begun to respond.

AGRICULTURE

Early in the 70s, Haiti provided 90% of its food from local production. By the end of the century, it was importing more than 42% of its supplies.

Prior to January 12, it was reflecting robust growth again and fortunately it was not too badly affected – so it continued to perform.

We should all applaud the group of Haitian farmers and peasant organizations which, in a recent protest, are insisting that the nation never revert to a state of food sub-dependency.

We have to find a way of buying the produce from local farmers, instead of importing all the food which need to be supplied as part of the prolonged relief requirements.

The strategy should be to purchase supplies for food aid from domestic sources.

The sector must be afforded the highest priority to ensure food security, provide jobs, boost exports and encourage rural development.

CARICOM has made available its capacity and experience to improve quality, reduce losses, strengthen infrastructure, extend research, enhance value added in the agriculture chain and strengthen the institutional capacity of small farmers and their support institutions. The issues for research are similar and the results can be shared.

TOURISM

Much of the Haitian tourism located in the North and the North West of the country remain intact. However, the broader infrastructural needs required to service the industry, including sea and airports, are in need of substantial rebuilding and require significant investments.

Several CARICOM tourism entities, signed a Memorandum of Understanding in February, agreeing to collaborate in efforts to remarket and rebrand Haitian tourism. The development of regional tourism packages can assist this sector to expand. Given its geographic proximity to Haiti, we regard Cuba as a major partner in such an undertaking.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The “bagay la” of January 12 resulted in the destruction of private and corporate property valued at US$5.5 billion or 70% of the total loss.

The end game must result in the emergence and growth of a dynamic, competitive and inclusive private sector, substantially owned by Haitian business persons who are genuinely committed to the building of “an economy which is modern, diversified and strong” as the Action Plan stipulates.

This means that the Haitian private sector, and by necessary extension, the rest of the CARICOM private sector, must be equipped and allowed to undertake significant portions of the work entailed in the recovery and development.

Through its President, Haiti has told the International Community that "the model of economic development should enable Haiti to become an effective member of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) in the shortest possible time.

Haiti is potentially the largest market in the CSME. It enjoys special access to key external markets.

The Economic Partnership with the European Union allows for the cumulation of inputs from CARICOM in meeting the qualifying conditions and Rules of Origin Criteria.

There are several challenges which could constrain the extent and effectiveness of Haiti/CARICOM Joint Ventures. Three deserve special attention:

(i) The absence of a mechanism to facilitate the partnering of Haitian Private Sector Entities/Investors with their counterparts in the rest of the Community;

(ii) Inadequate Export Credit Financing;

(iii) The absence of direct air and sea links, between Haiti and the rest of CARICOM and Haiti and some potential third markets in Latin America and the consequential high costs and delays of alternate routes.

In order to meet some of these challenges, CARICOM Governments have decided to –

i) facilitate a system for coordination and networking of the Regional Private Sector and its initiatives; and

ii) create a special Regional Promotional Tool for Effective Regional Economic Integration and Market Development.

iii) Establish and resource "a special CARICOM-HAITI Fund" for supporting Regional Private Sector Companies.

The initial target will be US$1billion. It will take into account facilities which are already being established by the Government of Spain, the IDB and private donors.

There will be a search for resources available at the Regional level, from dedicated Development Banks, through special Multilateral Funds, for such issues as climate change, deforestation and decertification.

The Second Meeting of the Technical Group, working to finalise the arrangements for the Fund to become operational will convene in Kingston soon.

All of this represents an exciting scenario for those who advocate a new strategy that reflects the startling changes which are unfolding in the global economy.

The new approach to accelerating the pace of integration requires that we:

i) Draw on the full range of regional resources in a collaborate and cooperative framework for planning and implementation;

ii) Deploy our diplomatic teams and use our external relationships to mobilize resources in support of particular Member States.

iii) Collaborate, cooperate and joint venture instead of maintaining a narrow focus on our small domestic markets.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Francis Bacon, centuries ago, asserted that “knowledge is power”. Today, no one can dare to question in an age of technology the inestimable value of building a knowledge economy and the compelling rationale for accumulating human capital.

This can only be secured by placing the highest priority, in accordance with the Action Plan on “a system of education which guarantees access to all children and offers vocational and university education to meet the demands of economic modernization.”

The Education Plan, as conceived by the Government of Haiti, is estimated to cost US$4.2 billion for a five-year period – running from Basic School to University level.

At the level of policy formation, institutional strengthening, curriculum development and teaching, the Caribbean Community is poised to make a major contribution in the process of recovery and development. We recognize that the development cannot be self-sustaining in the absence of adequate human capacity. Further, integration policies and measures are a pre-requisite to the development of a highly diversified services sector. There has to be greater emphasis on tertiary education and vocational skills, together with a well developed research infrastructure.

Let me remind you of the famous dictum of Eric Williams – "to educate is to emancipate." He would have been pleased to learn that the University of the West Indies, where he served as Pro-Chancellor, has under the guidance of its current Vice Chancellor, Professor Nigel Harris, given full support in developing a plan of assistance and partnership through scholarships and student exchange.

As we know too well, in that catastrophic event, all of the main Universities suffered devastating damage and loss of life.

The disaster ravaged the education system as a whole – the Université d'Haiti lost more than three hundred students and forty Faculty and Staff members on January 12. Many of its eleven Faculty buildings collapsed. The private Universities, of which there are more than a hundred, were also hit hard.

Since then, Haitian University Leaders have demonstrated great resilience, cooperation and vision regarding the redevelopment of their institutions. While trauma remains evident, there is an active move toward recovery and reconstruction. Regional assistance has been forthcoming in the form of technical expertise and training.

The intention is to rebuild the universities as soon as possible, and to develop creative forms of international collaboration including student placement in other regional institutions.

The Florida International University must be commended for its important offer of assistance to the State University of Haiti.

THE UWI HAITI INITIATIVE

A task force on Haitian Higher Education, led by Dr. Matthews Smith, Director of the UWI Haiti Initiative, has prepared a plan of assistance to UNICA's four Haitian members by forming cooperative links between them and their counterparts across the region. While the early priority of the initiative is to provide immediate assistance through scholarships for Haitian students, it also aims eventually to bridge the gap between the Francophone and the Anglophone Caribbean.

The UWI Haiti Initiative has developed two major projects of intervention to assist with the short to long-term rebuilding: (1) Restoration of Haitian libraries and patrimonial collections; and (2) Support for Haitian higher education through scholarship awards to students whose studies were affected by the earthquake.

As early as January 2010 the UWI made an offer to award 100 scholarships to students of the State University in their final year of study so as to complete their degrees in Jamaica and Trinidad.

One of the Doctor's most memorable assertions at the Mona Lecture in 1955 still resonates in my mind –

> "The best prospect for the transformation of Caribbean Society is in changing the mindset and expanding the mental and psychological horizons of our young people throughout the Region."

Haitian students who benefit from this programme will through their exposure, deepen their awareness of the responses of Haiti's neighbours in the region to similar problems of **economic vulnerability, regional security and democratic institutions.**

These students will return to Haiti next year, more knowledgeable of their disciplines and richer for the opportunity of having lived in another Caribbean island.

Not only will they know more about patties, roti, reggae and soca, but they will also show how to dance the merengue. These students will form a part of the rebuilding process in Haiti, bringing with them unique skills and experience. Students from around the Caribbean who attend the UWI campuses will, in turn, learn more about Haiti.

In the next few years the project will be expanded to include Mona students traveling to Haiti for semester-abroad programmes; distance education programmes between the two institutions; faculty exchanges; and joint research projects and publications between UWI and State University faculty.

Ultimately, it is hoped that the UWI plan and partnership with the State University of Haiti will be part of a larger Caribbean programme that build alliances across the Caribbean territories and strengthen the region's human capacities in the twenty-first century.

Professor Wilson Laleau, the Vice Rector of the State University of Haiti, has noted that through regional education policies and assistance universities may lead the way to a truly integrated Caribbean.

For the region as a whole, the international institutional partnerships that are being forged as a consequence of the January 12 disaster could be the precursor to the all-embracing multilingual association of Caribbean States; breaking down the barrier of language that has been a legacy.

DIASPORA

If we are to ensure that out of the rubble will rise a new Haiti, the skills and dynamic energies of the Diaspora must be fully mobilized. And when I refer to Diaspora, I am speaking of the entire Caribbean Diaspora, from Haiti and whatever other Member State from which they originate.

Haiti's challenges are our challenges. As we seek to build the new Haiti, we also seek to foster the growth of each and every one of our territories in the Caribbean.

This is precisely why we speak of the Caribbean Diaspora.

Every Caribbean person in the Diaspora wants to be involved in this Haitian renaissance of which we speak. They have made significant contributions in the relief effort; now is the time to take it to the next stage.

The rebuilding of the new Haiti will create opportunities for a range of professional and technical services, including consultancy services. It will require new systems and new technologies in a host of areas. These opportunities will require strategic alliances and partnerships among all actors – those in Haiti, those in the Caribbean and those who belong to the Caribbean diaspora.

Members of the Caribbean diaspora possess skills at the very highest levels and in almost all areas of endeavour. If these skills are pooled, person with person, company with company, group with group and the process is tied back to our home nations, we will be in an enviable position to participate in the rebuilding process. There would be the joy and satisfaction of knowing that <u>we</u> collectively created something for ourselves which is meaningful to each and everyone of us.

CONCLUSION

When confronted with a crisis, the Chinese regard it as too good “an opportunity to waste.”

Let us extend that aphorism:
The devastation of January 12 was so catastrophic that the opportunities it unleashed are incalculable.

What we know for sure is that we cannot return to the Haiti which existed on the morning of January 12.

We are certain that our goal must be to ensure a Renaissance of Haiti that accords with the dreams of those who fought for their freedom over two hundred years ago.

Dr. Williams understood well, that before the arrival of the European colonizers and slavemasters in our Caribbean sea, the Tainos, Caribs and Arawaks defied the stormy waves that separate us as they paddled in their cottonwood canoes from one island to another.

His erudition and dedication to the cause of Caribbean integration would have led him to seize this unique opportunity to advance a new momentum for Caribbean integration as advocates for Haiti in the international community and as full partners even after the sensationalism disappears. The reconstruction efforts in Haiti can also serve as a catalyst for economic growth and functional cooperation.

Haiti can unlock the door to ensure that Caribbean integration moves forward on the basis of unleashing our creative skills, improving productivity and the quality of life.

As Frederick Douglas said in Chicago on January 2, 1893 – When the black sons of Haiti "struck for freedom, they builded better than they knew. Their swords were not drawn simply for themselves alone. They were linked and interlinked with their race, and striking for their freedom. They struck for the freedom of every black man in the world."

[Prolonged applause]

He continued –

"It is said of ancient nations, that each had its special mission in the world and that each taught the world some important lesson.
The Jews taught the world a religion.
The Greeks taught the world philosophy and beauty.
The Romans taught the world jurisprudence.

Among these large bodies, the little community of Haiti, anchored in the Caribbean Sea, has had her mission in the world. She has taught the world the danger of slavery and the value of liberty. In this respect she has been the greatest of all our modern teachers."

It is high time for Haiti, once again, to be the trailblazer and emerge victorious from its long and arduous struggle to reclaim its pristine glory. But no longer will they bear the burden alone. CARICOM is providing that protective shield which will protect them from the buffeting tides – that will perpetuate their pride and dignity as a people.

The Caribbean Community is determined to play a defining role as we seek to reclaim our history, fashion our own culture, guarantee that final emancipation – iconic, symbolic, political, economic, psychological and spiritual and thereby shape our own destiny as one Caribbean people.