

REMARKS

BY

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PRIME MINISTER OF GRENADA**

AT THE

**OPENING OF THE
THIRTY-NINTH REGULAR MEETING
OF THE**

**CONFERENCE OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT
OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY**

**Jamaica
July 4-6, 2018**

Salutations:

- ❖ Incoming Chairman, the Most Honourable Andrew Holness;
- ❖ Other Heads of State and Government;
- ❖ Distinguished Ministers;
- ❖ Members of the Cabinet of the Government of Jamaica;
- ❖ Ambassador Irwin LaRocque, Secretary-General, CARICOM;
- ❖ Other Heads of Delegation;
- ❖ CARICOM Ambassadors and other Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
- ❖ Heads and staff of CARICOM Institutions;
- ❖ Representatives of the Media;
- ❖ People of the Caribbean Community...

I am quite pleased to be here in Jamaica, for this CARICOM meeting, with my regional colleagues, and to have another opportunity to share with you some ideas, which, I continue to believe, will take this Community forward.

Brother Prime Minister, my delegation is most appreciative of the generous hospitality which has been extended to us by your Government and people.

Allow me to congratulate my colleagues, the newly elected Heads of Governments of the Caribbean—Prime Minister Gaston Browne of Antigua & Barbuda and my dear friend and sister, Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados. It seems she has taken a page from my book but I hasten to remind her that she has two more pages to copy.

Colleagues, it might seem like I have delivered more than my fair share of addresses to this gathering. As I present today in my capacity as one of the Prime Ministers given a new mandate by the people in 2018, I am reminded of the awesome responsibility bestowed upon us—some of us over and over again—by the people of the region. For that reason we owe it to them to be more aggressive in pushing policies and actions that transform the region, turning us into true 21st century societies.

This meeting is occurring in a global context characterised by the frenetic pace of change—changing political configurations, ideological tensions, social revolution, and an increasing anxiety by significant groups and communities about economic, social and political inequality and marginalisation.

Our CARICOM family therefore finds itself at the centre of these global changes, significantly so in terms of phenomena such as climate change and vulnerability, and economic and political inequality.

Colleagues, the question is this: how does this CARICOM family reposition itself to navigate the new global landscape, in the context of what must be referred to as the “New Normal” for the small economies of the Caribbean?

Colleagues, against the backdrop of these global economic and social challenges, CARICOM must respond by fleshing out our own place in this “new normal.” It is, therefore, critical that our Community not allow itself to be a satellite of any power or group.

After over 30 years in the craft of politics in my country, it would be remiss of me to not signal to the region the possible perils of taking sides, sometimes blindly, on the basis of entrenched ideology and philosophical positions. To do so is neither in the interest of the Community as a collective group of states, or in the interest of a Caribbean civilisation, from the perspective of our nationals.

I continue to believe colleagues, that our greatest dividend as small states is in our ability to determine for ourselves on issues that are important to us, where our interest is best served, having regard to several factors. Among those are adherence to the principles of fairness, justice, democracy and the rule of law.

In this global arena, the time is nigh, that as a Community we also consolidate our positions on key hemispheric and international issues, which hold profound implications for our region.

Colleagues, in the context of the new normal, the 2018 hurricane season is once again upon us. Having witnessed the devastation we had last year, in my time as CARICOM Chairman, throughout many of our sister islands, the question must be asked: how prepared are we as a region for the next one?

What have we done in the months since to individually and collectively strengthen our systems and build the Caribbean's resilience?

I must commend the Community for its efforts in the last ten or so months, toward raising awareness and finances for the recovery efforts in affected Islands. The collective strength of the Community in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria has been on full display and we must continue to channel this force in aggressively pursuing resilience mechanisms to safeguard our societies.

In Grenada, upon resuming office in March, we took the bold step to commission a new ministry for Climate Resilience. The mandate of this ministry is to strengthen our coastal and marine environments to help mitigate the effects of climate change. One of our first actions is to introduce legislation that will ban the use of plastics and Styrofoam material that are harmful to the environment.

As a region, we must also hasten our steps toward the transition to a Green and Blue economy; understanding that our future development is intrinsically linked to how successfully we exploit these formerly untapped resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I firmly believe that we, in the Caribbean, can achieve what other countries have achieved in the area of resilience. Financing is one part of it, **but we also need the will.**

This new era requires our governments' unwavering commitment to courageous leadership and aggressive pursuit of policies and innovation. It will also require holistic decision-making, planning and action—but more than anything else, as Grenada knows only too clearly, and as PM Mottley is learning, it will need partnerships—from our politicians, academics, the business community, trade unions, churches, civil society, the media and our diaspora communities alike.

We also need renewed and continuous engagement with our youth populations. Colleagues, in navigating the new normal, and engaging our youth- there is one sure vehicle to take us forward, which we are woefully behind in riding. That is STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and perhaps at its simplest level—ICT—the Internet and information highway.

I must say at this juncture, that CARICOM has indeed taken bold steps in developing the work-plan for a CARICOM Single ICT Space. In a few months, we will be launching a multi-stakeholder partnership to fast-track specific elements of this Single ICT space.

Our steps in fully implementing this must continue to be clear, even while we push the proverbial technological envelope, so to speak, in rooting out and connecting other programmes and policies to transform this Community.

I include here our need to formulate a consensus CARICOM position on how we are going to deal with this pervasive, dynamic, and for many of us, mysterious, global phenomenon, which will no doubt reshape our financial, social and political systems, if employed optimally.

ICT must not be viewed as merely peripheral to the ideals we want to accomplish, or something to be “added” to the education curriculum. Technology impacts every aspect of our lives.

We, as Heads of Government therefore, have to be the ones to place STEM and ICT at the heart of what we want to accomplish as a region.

Indeed, it appears that every single day, there is some new global development in the technology field. In October 2017, the world gasped when Saudi Arabia became the first country to grant citizenship to a robot; yet we continue to grapple with the rights of our own **human** CARICOM citizens.

In May of this year, the European Union brought its General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) into force – and that regulation has the potential to cripple many of our industries, if we do not pay keen attention and fix our regulatory systems quickly.

There is a dynamic world unfolding before us, emanating from diverse applications of Artificial Intelligence, which could possibly help, even with many of the health issues besetting our citizens.

There are also simpler applications, such as block-chain technology, which is not only restricted to crypto currency. It could serve us well in our regional pursuits, especially those related to citizen and other Community data.

CARICOM cannot continue to ignore these great enablers of our time. We do so to our peril and the peril of our generations to come.

Colleagues, after 45 years, we must look dutifully ahead to the future of the Community. In that context, we cannot ignore the urgent need to hasten the speed of integration.

This Community must be made to work for the benefit of all its members; not just the two percent who happen to be beneficiaries of higher education. Intrinsic in our efforts to serve must be the interests of those in our Community who have not had the opportunity for success.

We need to look ahead to pursuing and promoting strategic, formal and practical cooperation between institutions of CARICOM and the media, to better maximise synergies and create greater results for the people of our region.

I will continue to advocate that our governments collectively work toward more accessible and affordable regional transport for the movement of our people, as was already well articulated by my colleague.

In conclusion colleagues, over the next few days of discussions, one of our objectives must be to not only focus on a results-oriented approach, but to hold each other accountable for implementation of the decisions taken.

We must use the deliberations of the conference to speak in audible tones, sending a clear message that we understand, and are in fact, re-committing to both the opportunity and imperative for change.

We must shun any action which contributes to what the economist Harding would refer to as the “**tragedy of the commons**,” where we believe that our individual actions do not hold larger consequences for the Community as a whole.

Let us not leave here, hiding behind phrases such as “we agree in principle,” knowing full well that we intend to afford ourselves the ‘political room’ for maneuver when it comes to non-implementation of key actions and decisions.

My friends, I believe that the deficit between CARICOM’s relevance and influence; between opportunity and promise; and between plans and delivery on the ground should be at the heart of our deliberations at this Thirty-Ninth Conference.

The God we serve has offered us another rare opportunity to get it right—to build a strong, resilient CARICOM Community, lest we condemn ourselves to mediocrity, and to increasing global irrelevance.

Colleagues, I look forward to our discussions and actions.

I thank you.