



Asamblea de los Pueblos del Caribe
Assembly of Caribbean People
Assemblée du Peuple Caraïbe
Assemblee van het Caraïbisch Volk
Asamble Pep Karayib

Calle Irigoyen No.5, próximo A v. Independencia,
Zona Universitaria, Santo Domingo, D.N.,
Republica Dominicana

DRAFT CALL

TO THE VIII ASSEMBLY OF CARIBBEAN PEOPLE

AUGUST 15-19, 2019

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

***“CONFRONTING THE IMPERIALIST AGENDA, THE RESISTANCE AND
UNITY OF OUR PEOPLES HAVE BEEN STRENGTHENED THROUGH
THE ASSEMBLY OF CARIBBEAN PEOPLE”***

Sisters and Brothers of the Caribbean,

A Message of Urgency:

Twenty-five years ago, in response to *“A Message of Urgency”* more than 200 Caribbean people gathered in Chaguaramas, Trinidad for the First Assembly of Caribbean People (ACP). For three days, our Caribbean sisters and brothers – 110 of whom travelled to Trinidad from 21 Caribbean territories and some diaspora communities - shared their experiences, analyses and ideas *“Towards a People’s Agenda for the Sovereignty of the Region and the Welfare of the People”*.

Today, we issue another *“Message of Urgency”* to the Caribbean Peoples to meet in Trinidad and Tobago from **August 15-19, 2019** so that we can together *“Confront the imperialist Agenda and Strengthen our Resistance and Unity through the VIII Assembly of Caribbean People”*.

As we enter into the 25th year since the birth of the Assembly of Caribbean People, we celebrate its VIII’s iteration which will take place coincident with Carifesta XIV – the region’s premier Arts and Cultural Festival. As our Caribbean people benefit from the powerful discussions at the VIII Assembly of Caribbean People, they can also attend the rich and diverse performances and other activities of Carifesta XIV carded to take place from August 16-25.

As we prepare to meet in Trinidad and Tobago for the VIII Assembly of Caribbean People, we are confronted with an aggressive imperialist agenda more than at any other time in the last 25

years, whose objective has at its core the negation of all that we, as Caribbean people desire and aspire towards.

The Neo-liberal Agenda

Neo-liberal capitalism has firmly entrenched itself as “globalization”. With few exceptions our countries have adopted this paradigm of unregulated capitalism – where the power rests with the owners and managers of big capital: both local and foreign. The rest of society has been relegated to being consumers and thus contributors to the huge wealth and ever rising incomes of the elites. At the same time, trade unions have been weakened, workers’ rights have been under attack, and precarious work has become institutionalized, resulting in the balance between capital and labour becoming more and more skewed in favour of capital. Wages and salaries have thus become smaller and smaller relative to the profits, dividends and bonuses of corporate executives. Consequently, an increasing number of people are joining the ranks of the poor and working class while wealth inequality continues to rise.

As the neo-liberal paradigm of development continues to wreak havoc on society, the environment did not escape its nefarious grasp as we lose agricultural land and forests and commerce takes priority over food and the preservation of the natural habitat. The demand for consumption, the over exploitation of primary commodities and the increasing use of energy have all resulted in the existential threat of climate change with ever more frequent and destructive so-called natural disasters. Our small and vulnerable economies and eco-systems in the Caribbean are particularly at risk as evidenced by the destruction in many islands by recent hurricanes and storms.

Neo liberal economic policies also exacerbate the social crises of high unemployment especially among the youth, low incomes prevail, and austerity measures that deny communities basic infrastructure and essential goods and services are the order of the day. In addition to the denial of these basic goods and services such as water, electricity and decent housing; these policies have fostered youth alienation, the rise of gangs, the normalisation of violence, which are then further aggravated by international trafficking of narcotics, guns, and humans.

Politically, many of our governments are also caught in the web of structural adjustment through programmes mandated by the IMF and other institutions of the Washington Consensus. The debt problem that existed 25 years ago has never gone away for the region, it keeps returning at different times for different countries with the same result – austerity! Transparency, accountability and good governance have not been the norm of most governments. In the absence of participatory governance, citizens respond to the failures of governments by voting them out, but the fundamental problems of a neo-colonial state still remains unchanged and continues to frustrate our people’s desire for a better life.

Imperialist Threat

There is no doubt that neo-liberalism is in crisis. Neo-liberalism brought along with it, the insecurity of work and of life; the failure to deliver a better life for the masses; growing inequality; loss of trust and confidence in traditional politics, parties and governments and the

subsequent rise of the right wing, and in some cases neo-fascist personalities, parties and governments both in the global north – the US, Europe and in the global south – Philippines, Brazil. The use of state power by these right wing and neo-fascist forces is resulting in the reversal of progressive policies; the threatening and attacking of progressive social movements and parties; and major acts of aggression against progressive governments aimed at regime change by fomenting civil unrest, civil war and if that fails, even military intervention.

Our Caribbean region, a region that has been declared a “Zone of Peace” by CARICOM and CELAC, is therefore facing grave danger. US imperialism with the right wing Trump as President has sought to divide the region on the issue of Venezuela. The United States is exerting great pressure on our governments to violate the international principles of respecting the sovereignty of states and non-interference in the internal affairs of a state and is stepping up its aggression against Cuba by tightening the blockade. Under right-wing Trump, the United States is also openly advocating a coup d’etat and military intervention in the sovereign state of Venezuela. The Munroe Doctrine is very alive and well, threatening all of our countries. At the same time the US, Britain, France and Holland have refused to relinquish their colonial control of many of our Caribbean territories. Imperialism in 2019 effectively seeks to keep us under their control or simply return us to colonial status.

The Assembly of Caribbean People: A Bulwark of our Defence Emerges

That First Assembly of Caribbean People began with the germ of an idea from a notable Caribbean political and cultural activist, John La Rose – one of the persons honoured by this VIII ACP. John proposed a “*Caribbean Workers and People’s Congress*” when a significant number of Caribbean labour, cultural and political activists gathered in Trinidad and Tobago to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the June 19th, 1937 General Strike in Trinidad and the resulting birth of the modern trade union movement and the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union (OWTU). Coincident with that anniversary was the holding of the Fifth Caribbean Trade Union Solidarity Conference and the First Caribbean Peoples International Bookfair and Bookfair Festival.

This was just 4 short years after the terrible events of October 1983 which ended the Grenadian Revolution. Much of the region was in economic crisis with the policies of the IMF holding sway. CARICOM was in a shambles. Cuba had become more isolated in the Caribbean as most of the governments in the region gave their allegiance to Washington. The USSR and Eastern Europe were undergoing major changes and Reagan and Thatcher boldly stated “There Is No Alternative” to the imperialist agenda.

The OWTU published a proposal for this Congress in the *Caribbean Contact* (the region’s then foremost journal) and started informal conversations with a number of friends – progressive academics and activists in the emerging NGO movement. Those discussions led to a Preparatory Conference held in Trinidad from November 20-22, 1992. That Preparatory Conference had the participation of a number of Caribbean countries where it was resolved that there should be the Assembly of Caribbean People as a Pan-Caribbean process to involve all the territories – independent nations and those that were still colonies – of the Caribbean, regardless of language.

It was also determined that the process should be completely inclusive of gender, age, sector (workers, farmers, fisher folk, intellectuals, artistes, business-people), faith, political party affiliation – who all subscribed to the need for a ***“People’s Agenda for the Sovereignty of the Region and the Welfare of the People”***.

The First Assembly of Caribbean People was thus convened from August 19-21, 1994.

Today, twenty-five years after 1994 and 32 years after the germ of the idea was seeded in 1987, the Assembly of Caribbean People has not simply survived but has constantly renewed itself. This is testimony to the validity and value of the idea that there is a need for Caribbean people to come together despite the various elements that try to keep us apart; and the need to outline our own agenda ensuring our wellbeing, sovereignty and development. The First Assembly had the benefit of support from international NGOs. From that time on, however, the ACP has continuously been continued through collective indigenous resources and efforts.

2019 – We Affirm the Assembly of Caribbean People

The story of the ACP is indeed a story of the people’s resistance to the imperialist. It is a story of our commitment to the unity and integration of the Peoples of the Caribbean. It is a story of our collective search for identity. It is the story of our struggle for freedom and independence – economic, social and cultural. It is the story of our confronting discrimination and injustices – social, economic, environmental and political. It is a story of our right to sovereignty. It is the story of the Caribbean People’s long march towards creating the Caribbean civilization with our own ethos, ethic and aesthetic.

While we face many serious threats and grave dangers, we also recognize that our region and our Peoples have always resisted oppression and fought for their freedom. That resilient spirit is what led us to emerge from slavery, indentureship and for many of us, from colonialism. That spirit of struggle and rebellion has never been extinguished – though the flame may grow dim for periods of time. We also recognize all the progressive social movements that have emerged in other regions of the world in response to the crisis of neo-liberalism who share our common vision of Another World.

We are confident that our Caribbean people will continue to fight for Another World. We affirm our belief that the Assembly of Caribbean People is an indispensable process in this fight as it is a space for reflection, analysis, unity and planning for collective actions.

We look forward to having many of our Caribbean sisters and brothers meeting at the VIII Assembly of Caribbean People as we renew our unity and strengthen our resistance to the Imperialist Agenda so that we can construct for ourselves a Caribbean that is sovereign; sustainable economies, a stable environment and a Caribbean where there is social justice and a better life for all!

We will greet you in Trinidad and Tobago from August 15-19, 2019!