

Remarks by Fred Mitchell MP

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Kamau Brathwaite, the Barbadian poet writes in his work *Negus*:

*It is not enough to be free  
of the red white and blue  
of the drag of the dragon...*

In the days just before Christmas the great man Nelson Mandela died. The Bahamian Prime Minister had made arrangements to get to South Africa on a commercial airline. We received a call from the Secretary General's office at Caricom to say that the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Kamla Persad-Bissessar had offered a Caribbean Airlines flight to all Caricom countries without cost and would we take advantage of the offer. Our Prime Minister agreed rightaway. He was joined by the President of Haiti, Deputy Prime Ministers of Grenada and St. Lucia, the Foreign Minister of Barbados and Ambassador from Antigua and Barbuda. That single gesture of Caribbean outreach made

an impression on Africa and ourselves which went beyond what money could buy. The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago who is ethnically Indian, wore on the occasion an African dress and headwear. She was resplendent. She joined the heads of Jamaica, Guyana and Suriname who had already made their way there. We appeared in South Africa as a team. That is Caricom at its best. This was no group of groveling mendicants, as Errol Barrow had once lamented about Caribbean leaders. In South Africa, the Leaders got along well and the chemistry was there. It is that chemistry about which Prime Minister Kenny Anthony spoke last year when he hosted the heads of government conference as being the key to Caricom's survival.

Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar's decision reinforced the great comfort which The Bahamas got when in September last year CARICOM issued a statement in support of The Bahamas in the face of withering criticism by Cuban American Protestors in Miami. We knew we were not alone, someone had our back.

Tonight's discussion is about Caricom's survival.

I am pleased to be here. This is a special honour for me and for The Bahamas. Being up at the northern end of the chain people tend to think of us as a world away and a world apart but I have come to tell you this evening that we see ourselves as an integrated part of this region. Our founding father the late Sir Lynden Pindling on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1983 committed our country to this Caricom project. He reaffirmed that by signing the Grand Anse Declaration in 1989 committing The Bahamas to the Single Market and Economy although we have some ways to go.

All governments of The Bahamas, admittedly with varying degrees of enthusiasm, have embraced the notion that we have a common future together.

I come therefore tonight representing that generation of Bahamians to whom the task of governance for today has been entrusted, to renew our commitment to the Caricom enterprise.

Caricom is not just an economic project. It is the very soul of our people from Bermuda to Suriname. It is that narrative that I have come to tell.

In doing so I begin by saying thank you to my hosts for their gracious invitation to listen to what I have to say. I recall Pastor David Johnson who has now sadly passed away. He was being honoured with the naming of the village Christmas tree in my Fox Hill constituency. He was then 77 years old. He said he could not believe it. He could still on that cool winter evening in Nassau remember when he was running around in short pants and talking about the elders of the Fox Hill village. Now, he said they are calling me one of the elders.

That is the stark reality of time. It reminds us that our time on the stage is short but I committed myself a long time ago to the notion that if I ever got a chance to be on the public stage, I would not squander the opportunity. I would do what I was called upon to do.

So this then is dedicated to all of those teachers and their patience from the time I was a little boy, my parents particularly my mother who forced me to wake up early each morning and get ahead of the day. Dedicated to Dawson Conliffe and Bonaventure Dean my old headmasters. All now gone on but they live on the heart and mind of their student.

I thank Dr. Monica Davis, the Honorary Consul for The Bahamas to Trinidad and Tobago, who graduated with me from high school in The Bahamas way back in June of 1970 at the Catholic High School in Nassau St. Augustine's College.

James Baldwin reminds us in The Amen Corner, how strange life is, the twists and turns it takes. I call these Dickensian moments, after the pattern in those Dickens novels where someone disappears at the start of the book and then magically pops up at the end of the book with a smart and pleasant surprise.

I would like to thank the Secretary General Irwin La Rocque for his kindly providing me with access to the Secretariat's headquarters building where this work was largely written and to his supportive staff. The speech was written in Georgetown, Guyana which V.S. Naipaul the Trinidadian born writer described in turns as "the most beautiful city in the West Indies" and then "the most exquisite city in the British Caribbean."

I also thank the current Prime Minister of The Bahamas Perry Christie for permitting my participation in this, even as he complained that I was going to be away from home too long. However, I have always enjoyed a good relationship with all my bosses and with this boss the relationship is no different. I thank my constituents and Cabinet and Parliamentary colleagues for their understanding and support.

I would however be remiss if I did not also dedicate this evening's presentation to a man I greatly admired and respected. The name: Rex Nettleford. I first met him when I travelled with the late Winston Saunders, a Bahamian scholar and cultural icon in his own right, to Kingston for Carifesta in 1976. To quote one of the English ladies of quality who admired him, this man Rex Nettleford simply said " the

most wonderful things”. He had a way of expressing life that could not be copied. He was an intellectual leader in Jamaica and widely admired and respected throughout the region as a dancer, choreographer, lecturer, trade unionist, writer, thinker, Vice Chancellor of the University of The West Indies and finally as the Chairman of the Public Service Commission in Jamaica. He died at the age of 76 on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2010, four years ago.

Caricom is an idea born from the genetics of the people themselves. I for example am the grandson of a Barbadian Sonny Forde who came to The Bahamas with his father at the turn of the last century as a baby. His father was a tailor for the Bahamian police force. My great grand grandmother was named Angelina Barrow. I never knew any of them.

The founder of our country Sir Lynden Pindling was the son of a Jamaican policeman who emigrated to The Bahamas. Many in the Cabinet that ended the white minority rule government in 1967 had one parent from the southern Caribbean. Indeed today the Governor General of The Bahamas Sir Arthur Foulkes is the son of a Haitian woman. Our first Black Member of Parliament in The Bahamas was Haitian, a man by the name Stephen Dillette elected in 1834.

Lynden Pindling was a classmate in law school in London of the late Dame Lois Browne Evans of Bermuda. She founded the PLP (Progressive Labour Party) in Bermuda with the advice and counsel of Sir Lynden of the PLP (Progressive Liberal Party) of The Bahamas. The rallying cry of both parties to this day is “ All the way!”. It was Ewart Brown, a successor of Dame Lois and a former Bermuda Premier who mooted the idea at a Caricom Heads of Government meeting of a

Caricom airline that could provide transport for people from Bermuda to Suriname within a single day without having to traverse Miami.

I dedicate this to Rex Nettleford because he always talked about “ the Caribbean ethos”. That is what this evening’s address is really about: the Caribbean ethos. The Caricom project came about and continues and will continue because of the Caribbean ethos. What St. Vincent’s Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves amongst others has called “ the Caribbean civilization”.

So I am deeply indebted to Rex for imbuing in me a sense of hope and confidence that we as a people will one day get to the promised land.

Shortly after he died, there was a symposium in Kingston which was dedicated to his work and life. Some of Jamaica’s intellectuals and scholars were there. I was invited to lunch with some of them. For the first time in the history of my relationship with Jamaicans I detected despair. This was in the middle of the Dudus affair.

They lamented what had happened to their country. They did not see a way forward. They did not think that even with all their intellectual capacity that they could see a way out. They lamented the rise of criminal behavior in every enterprise, going so far as to say that they were shocked that some of the most respected business people in the country were infected by criminal enterprises.

This left me quite disturbed. I had come up at a time when Jamaica was bold and strong and relentless, no despair. Even in the worst of the economic issues of the Manley years, that remained true. Michael

Manley himself told me that he was unreconstructed, unapologetic and unrepentant. That was the Jamaica I knew.

Stay with me for a minute here.

We in the Progressive Liberal Party returned to power in The Bahamas in 2002. We had lost to the Free National Movement ten years earlier in 1992 which ushered in a more conservative and laissez faire attitude toward governance.

The Leader of our party Lynden Pindling who had founded the modern Bahamian state was thrown out of office unceremoniously in 1992 after 25 years and within 8 years was dead of prostate cancer. When we came back in 2002, the Caricom leadership of Manley, Burnham, Williams, Barrow had all passed on and we met a new order.

The new order was Kenny Anthony, P J Patterson, Jean Bertrand Aristide, Ralph Gonsalves, Patrick Manning, Owen Arthur, all a new generation of Caricom leaders, all forged in the crucible of the region's premier institution the University of the West Indies with the exception of Mr. Aristide.

Jamaica's Prime Minister P J Patterson explained that Haiti had no other natural allies than we in Caricom in the sub region and he believed that it was necessary that they not stand alone and he persuaded them to join us.

Amongst these new leaders was a commitment to the Caricom project. Even when there were strong disagreements around the table you got the feeling that no one would leave. There were some strong disagreements

as in the meeting in St. Lucia in 2005 when P J Patterson sought to bring the Leaders of the Opposition together with the Prime Ministers in order to forge a consensus on the Caribbean Court of Justice. The meeting got off to a rocky start when one of the Leaders of the Opposition said he would not sit next to that Prime Minister because that Prime Minister was trying to put him in jail.

We stayed in office until 2007 when we lost to Hubert Ingraham, the Leader of the Opposition and once Prime Minister again. It surprised everyone in the region including us.

However, we might have seen it coming, for a trend against incumbents had started to develop: St Lucia had had elections in December 2006 and Kenny Anthony lost, then we lost in Nassau in May 2007. Then there was a loss by Portia Simpson Miller in Jamaica in September 2007, and then by Owen Arthur in Barbados in January 2008, Said Musa lost on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2008 in Belize and then a loss by Keith Mitchell in Grenada on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2008.

Patrick Manning, the then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago speaking at a political rally in Port of Spain reminded his party how up to that time he had bucked the trend. Here is how the press reported the statement by the then Prime Minister on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2008:

*“Prime Minister Patrick Manning said yesterday that his controversial actions in the selection of candidates in the last general election were vindicated by the results of the elections across the Caribbean.*

*“Addressing the PNM's 42nd Annual Convention, Manning noted that many people questioned the strategy he employed in the selection of candidates, which saw many senior MPs and Cabinet members rejected.*



*“Let me ask you this question, where is the last Government of Belize?” Manning enquired. ‘Gone!’ the crowd replied. ‘The last Government of the Bahamas?’ he asked. ‘Gone!’ was the refrain. ‘The last Government of Jamaica?’ he enquired. ‘Gone!’ shouted the crowd. ‘The last Government of Barbados?’ he asked. The response was the same. ‘The last Government of St Lucia?’ ‘Gone!’ they shouted. ‘Where is the last Government of Grenada, my dear friends?’ ‘Gone!’ the crowd chorused. ‘Where is the last Government of Trinidad and Tobago?’ Thunderous applause drowned out the words, ‘Here, here.’”*

Of course, history now shows that in 2010, a trend had indeed developed and that trend continued in Trinidad and Tobago. My larger point here is that we can detect the shifts in our societies by looking at one another.

Another example is how Jamaica started to develop a crime problem in the 1970s and many of them as they fled Jamaica and came to Nassau would warn us that we too would face the problem of bars on our windows and crime out of control. We are seeing these same pathologies today in The Bahamas.

My point is that on this anecdotal level, trends seem to develop in our region and it tends to start south and move north.

The trend reversed itself somewhat within five years when beginning with Kenny Anthony, some of the men who had lost power five years before were back in power again. Kenny Anthony described it on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2012 in St Lucia as returning to power following a period of political metanoia. This inspired us in The Bahamas. In addition to

Perry Christie, Portia Simpson Miller has returned and so has Keith Mitchell of Grenada. Of the original group that were Perry Christie's peers in 2002, only Ralph Gonsalves and Denzil Douglas are still there uninterrupted by the vagaries of democracy. Everyone else had lost elections.

What we do then in The Bahamas, is we look at the Caricom region and what is happening here because it has been a fairly reliable predictor of what may transpire in our own society.

In fact, the talent to run our election campaigns has often come from Trinidad, Jamaica and Barbados.

You may also know that the Progressive Liberal Party was founded following a visit in 1953 to Jamaica by the founders of the Party and talks with the then leadership of the Peoples National Party.

My thesis then is that the development of the Caricom project is a natural projection of what has been done on an informal basis by people over the years as they migrated from one territory to the next.

Who can forget how the lives of the region and of Trinidad and Tobago were influenced and transformed by the man now known as the Mighty Sparrow who hailed from Grenada.

I have styled this lecture rather grandly " Saving Caricom". That has elicited many responses from many people but most people have said " how are you going to do that?" I argue that it does not need a savior, contrary to the harsh judgment issued by the Trinidadian writer V.S. Naipaul in his essay The Killings In Trinidad. Caricom is a project that grows itself. The project is organic and when one looks at the history of the events, it shows that the Caribbean ethos causes it to survive, compels it to survive.

In this effort I adopt the history as outlined by the distinguished Secretary General of Caricom Irwin La Rocque.

In an address delivered right here in Trinidad on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013, the Secretary General gave the summary narrative of the founding of the modern Caricom project. I think that one decision that should be made is to adopt a common narrative about the founding of the organization and spread the story. It is important for the history to be reduced to a bite size. It makes for part of the wider understanding amongst the younger people of how we came to be where we are. The Secretary General wrote:

*“Ladies and Gentlemen, in real terms our integration process can be regarded as beginning eighty one years ago, given that it was in 1932 that the first concrete proposals for Caribbean unity were put forward at a meeting of Caribbean labour issues leaders in Roseau, Dominica.*

*“It was the labour movement which championed and pioneered integration as a means of self-governance for the West Indian territories. At congress in the late 1920s and 1930s, Caribbean labour leaders went from discussion of the idea to actually drafting a constitution for the unified territories, aided in large measure by a young economist from Saint Lucia, Arthur Lewis, who later distinguished himself and the region as our first Nobel Laureate.*

*“Progress stalled with the intervention of the Second World War but shortly after its end in 1945, momentum was regained towards independence as a unit. This was the main theme of a landmark meeting which took place in 1947 at Montego Bay, Jamaica. Out of that meeting, the process began towards the West Indies Federation. This Federation would eventually involve the British colonies, with the exception of then British Guiana and British Honduras, and came into being in 1958. Its goal was Independence and some services were established to support*

*the West Indian nation, including a Supreme Court and a shipping line. In preparing for Independence, a plan for a Customs Unit was drawn up but during the four years for the Federations existence free trade was not introduced among the islands.*

*“The end of the Federation in 1962 brought a close to this phase and to this approach to integration. In many ways, however, the end of the Federation led to the beginning of another chapter in the integration process which would evolve into the Caribbean Community. The need to maintain and possibly expand the Common Services that existed during the Federation was the catalyst for that (1963) Common Services Conference which I mentioned earlier. The UWI and the Regional Shipping Service along with the Caribbean Meteorological Service, which began one year later, kept the embers of integration glowing along with the so called Little 8, comprising the Windward and Leeward Islands and Barbados which stayed together after the dissolution of the Federation.*

*The Little 8 folded in 1965 and later that year, the Premiers of Barbados and British Guiana and the Chief Minister of Antigua and Barbuda Messrs Barrow, Burnham and Bird respectively, agreed to establish the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA). It was the first attempt to integrate through trade. The other territories joined the initiative and CARIFTA was launched in 1968 along with the Commonwealth Caribbean Regional Secretariat, which became the CARICOM Secretariat.*

*“During that period, “regional nationalism” was alive and well. It was a nationalism born out of a common desire and recognition of the imperative to forge our individual nationalism within a regional context. There was a political chemistry among our leaders.*

*“Eight years later, recognizing that CARIFTA could only carry us thus far, our Leader felt confident enough to move on to a Common Market and Community and deepened integration arrangements on the basis of three pillars: economic integration; foreign policy co-ordination and*

*functional co-operation. The Treaty of Chaguaramas formalizing this new agreement was signed in 1973. That Treaty which reflected the aspirations of the time could only carry us so far. It included a Common External Tariff (CET) which incidentally requires Member States to give up some sovereignty. However, decisions were largely unenforceable and dispute settlement arrangements were weak. Trade barriers among members were also rampant and many of the provisions of the Treaty were best endeavor clauses.*

*“Sixteen years later, the watershed meeting of Heads of Government at Grand Anse, Grenada in 1989 set the Region on course towards the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). Grand Anse was a bold response to the circumstances of the day. The Community was faced with a changing global economic environment while the performance of the regional economy was sluggish. The traditional market for our commodities was threatened with the advent of the European Single Market, and discussions continued on the global trading arrangements. Both of these developments would result in preference erosion for the commodities the Region had come to rely on so heavily. Grant assistance was also declining. Our Leaders recognized that we needed to become more self-reliant for our development. A deeper form of integration was the logical answer to those challenges.*

*“To accommodate this even deeper form of integration, the Treaty was revised significantly and was signed in 2001. That revision of the treaty set out the objectives for the Community, including the Single Market and Economy. These include improved standards of living and work; full employment of labour and other factors of production accelerated, coordinated and sustained economic development and convergence; enhanced co-ordination of Member States’ foreign policies; and enhanced functional co-operation. That last objective recognized the need for more efficient operation of common services and intensified activities in areas such as health, education, transportation and telecommunications.*

*“In 2006, five years after the signing of the Revised Treaty, the Single Market was ushered in. Twelve of our fifteen Member States form the Single Market, while Haiti and Montserrat are working towards putting it into place.*

*In the midst of these various transitions in the wider Region, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), whose Members are either Member States or Associate Members of CARICOM, have also been strengthening their integration arrangements which were first codified with the Treaty of Basseterre in 1981. In many ways the OECS has moved beyond CARICOM with the Revised Treaty of Basseterre Establishing the OECS Economic Union, signed in 2010, which among other things has granted free movement of persons within the Member States. This is an integration group that has had its own single currency and institutions, such as its Central Bank, Supreme Court and Stock Exchange. There is much to be learnt from the progress being made at the level of the OECS which could assist the wider integration effort.”*

I would only argue also that along with the common narrative on the founding of the Caricom project, there was the parallel story of the emergence of the Pan African Movement across the Caribbean and the struggle for national independence, the Negritude movement, the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the common cause found in the struggle of the Indians who had come to this part of the world as indentured workers. All of those blended together to produce what we now call today Caricom.

There were times when the project appeared to be imperiled. It seems to me that most people will say that this was the case during the seven years when the Heads of Government did not meet. It is interesting reading the 1982 speeches, the first of the Conference meetings after a

break of seven years. By that time, Eric Williams had passed away and while some of the founders of the project were there, there was a new world order.

By the time the Conference took place in 1982 in Ocho Rios, Edward Seaga had become Prime Minister of Jamaica, with Ronald Reagan in the White House in Washington. Mr. Seaga was embraced by the new U.S. administration as a sign that a more conservative era had returned to the Caribbean after the work in democratic socialism under Michael Manley.

It is not clear why the conference had not met during those 7 years. I sought to find the reasons. The best I could discover was that a row broke out amongst the leaders over some issue and they simply refused to attend.

It was left to the ministers in council to carry on the work and in 1982, the leaders met in Ocho Rios in Jamaica and conferences have met ever since then.

The Bahamas joined Caricom on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1983. We had become independent on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1973. I am not certain why it took us ten years to join, since we had been participating in the work of many of the institutions of the project from the 1950s. The main one being the University of the West Indies and then the Council of Legal Education and the Medical Council.

Several generations of Bahamians have been trained at the University, in the law school and in the medical school. Our first student was Dr. Cecil Bethel who enrolled in the medical school in 1952.

In 1983, I was then working as a special assistant out of the Bahamas Information Services in the Prime Minister's office. I recall two things about Caricom at that time. The death of Maurice Bishop, the Prime Minister of Grenada took place on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1983. The question was whether or not The Bahamas and other Caricom leaders would support the decision of the United States to invade Grenada to restore constitutional order. According to a recollection by former Guyana Foreign Minister Rashleigh Jackson on [guyanacaribbeanpolitics.com](http://guyanacaribbeanpolitics.com) *"...The Bahamas, Guyana, Belize and Trinidad and Tobago were against any military action, whereas Barbados and Jamaica were clearly in favour of the OECS countries issuing an invitation to the United States of America to join with them in an invasion of Grenada..."*

I am happy to have included that story because I have travelling with me two researchers and aides from the Ministry in Nassau Joy Newbold and Jamahl Strachan. Ms Newbold was born in the year the coup took place in Grenada in 1979. Mr. Strachan was born in 1988 well after both the coup and the invasion had taken place. The idea that there had been a coup in a Caricom country had been news to them and with this inclusion they were enlightened about the story. It led to a full discussion with the Secretary General again on the need for a definitive narrative on how we have come to where we are.

That disagreement over Grenada did not break up Caricom. In fact at the Heads of Government meeting in The Bahamas from 4<sup>th</sup> July to 7<sup>th</sup> July 1984, Nicholas Brathwaite, Chairman of the Interim Advisory Council,



Grenada was accepted into the conference as the legitimate representative of the Grenadian people and the representative of Jamaica Edward Seaga was also there at the Caricom table.

The conference continues to meet, often in a most passionate form.

The second thing that I remember from that time with Sir Lynden was that a decision was made on the question of putting the Tourism School for the University of the West Indies in Nassau. He said that he had made it plain to his colleagues that since The Bahamas was then the leader of tourism in the region that was the best place to put the school and they agreed.

That was my introduction to Caricom.

In 1979, as the Director of News and Public Affairs for our Broadcasting Corporation I got to meet for the first time one Percival James Patterson, otherwise known as P J. He was then Foreign Minister for Jamaica in and around the time of the coup against Maurice Bishop in 1979. As fate would have it, I became Minister of Foreign Affairs of The Bahamas in 2002 and ended up working closely with Mr. Patterson on perhaps the most contentious issue of our era that of Haiti, and the overthrow of Jean Bertrand Aristide as President of Haiti about which I shall have more to say later.

I turn now to a document that was adopted by the Heads of Government in 1997 which loomed very large when I became Minister in 2002 but seems now to have lapsed into obscurity but you will see why I am arguing now that it should become more central to what Caricom is and should be revisited and updated. It is called the Charter Of Civil Society. It was adopted in 1997 and while it is not justiciable, or so it appears, in that it is not community law in so far as I am aware, the document says the following at XXVI:

*“The States declare their resolve to pay due regard to the provisions of this Charter”.*

As lawyers often say, at the very least then this Charter is binding in honour. It forms the basis of a descriptive and normative set of values to which we all adhere and aspire and if any country does not agree with those values, then ipso facto they cannot be a member of Caricom. Thus those who argue in favour of Cuba becoming a Caricom member without changes in the conduct of the internal arrangements at governance in Cuba, may have an uphill battle.

Certainly for The Bahamas, it was the pretext for us to implement consultations in our country through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with civil society. That practice fell into disuse when the PLP lost office in 2007 and we have been seeking to revive it. Article XXV calls for reports to be sent to the Secretary General periodically. There are supposed to be National Committees reviewing the implementation of the Charter.

I believe that it is time to put the words of this charter into action. I believe that while the Caricom Single Market And Economy (CSME) is a valuable and valued project and aspiration, you will find that the emphasis on that aspect of our relations and the difficulties of harmonizing economies and market space have caused some of the negativity which we now see toward Caricom. When you look at the successes of this region and the functional cooperation that has been engendered, the work of the specialized agencies, you will see that Caricom has been a roaring success. It is time therefore to look to human rights issues.

Nothing is more contentious than this issue in our politics that I now raise, given the religious aversion, and visceral reactions to discussion of LGBT issues in our region. Some people see it as striking at the very heart and fabric of our cultural identity. The Bahamas is not an exception to that aversion with many people seeing the discussion as a moral and religious one and not a human rights one. My own political career suffers because of my insistence that in this regard like all other aspects of human life, there must be tolerance at a minimum and we must uphold the principle that the general rights for which we fought as being rights for all people, particularly as a formerly enslaved and indentured people, cannot be derogated from because of someone's sexual orientation. In other words, when the Charter in Article III says:

*“States shall, in the discharge of their legislative, executive administrative and judicial functions ensure respect for and protection of the human dignity of every person.”*

That in my view means literally every person and not just confined to what Article V says:

*“ No person shall be favoured or discriminated against by reason of age, colour, creed, disability, ethnicity, gender, language, place of birth or origin, political opinion, race, religion or social class.”*

The Charter is a 1997 document so orientation was not included and perhaps even in today's atmosphere cannot be included but the conversation has begun and the pressure from other societies with whom we deal is upon us to consider what our stand is on the rights of all people. Do we as a society for example condone violence against people simply because of their sexual orientation? The answer to that must be no. And if the answer is not no to that, then the charter is not worth the paper it is written on.

The Prime Ministers of Barbados Freundel Stuart and Dr. Denzil Douglas of St Christopher and Nevis have begun public discussions of these issues in their societies. The Prime Minister of Barbados even challenged the Anglican Church on the subject at their provincial synod. That was right and just. The Bahamas has decriminalized behavior associated with sexual orientation.

We have available in aid and comfort to any change to amplify the discrimination provision in the Charter, the constitution of South Africa which admits to orientation as one of the named classes for which there can be no discrimination. There are profound changes throughout the United States and Europe our main trading and cultural partners on this issue. It would be unwise to ignore it.

I often find that in drafting solutions to contentious problems that one solution is a generic one. One solution is that the Charter can become justiciable with enforceable rights across the community. Less coercively, it can be open to the Caribbean Court of Justice as the final arbiter of Community Law to adjudicate upon the Charter and declare the rights of individuals for any aggrieved individual seeking an opinion from the court declaring his rights and the wording of the provision at Article V can be reworded to read:

*“ No person shall be favoured or discriminated against by reason of including but not limited to the following: age, colour, creed, disability, ethnicity, gender, language, place of birth, origin, political opinion, race, religion, social class or some other characteristic which in the opinion of the Court deserves special protection.”*

Of course the short way to deal with this is simply to add orientation as one of the listed characteristics. I have no remit to pronounce on that, however and I do not do so.

What is important is that our leaders have already begun the conversation and that conversation should continue. That conversation should be underpinned with the principles of tolerance and the protection of the law for another disadvantaged group.

Less contentiously I suspect will be the question of the extent to which the principle of non-interference in the affairs of another Caricom state still applies given what happened in Grenada in 1979 and again in 1983. When a state disintegrates and is under threat because of natural disasters that is an easy question to answer but not so easy when one faces the question of civil disorder over political and civic issues.

The experience of Grenada and the restoration of democracy there has perhaps set the precedent that a Governor General or President, acting in his own deliberate judgment can call for outside assistance, even military or policing assistance.

Perhaps the Charter ought to be amended to make clear what the position of Member States will be when the human rights of individuals in a member state are so violated that it begs the question of outside interference. This is dangerous ground I admit, one on which we tread carefully.

This is said against the backdrop of the much publicized speech of the American Secretary of State John Kerry to the Organization of American States (OAS) on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2013:

*“...In the early days of our republic, the United States made a choice about its relationship with Latin America. President James Munroe, who was also a former Secretary of State, declared that the United States would unilaterally, and as a matter of fact, act as the protector of the region. The doctrine that bears his name asserted our authority to step in and oppose the influence of European powers in Latin America. And throughout our nation’s history, successive presidents have reinforced that doctrine and made a similar choice.*

*“Today, however, we have made a different choice. The era of the Munroe Doctrine is over. The relationship—that’s worth applauding. That’s not a bad thing. The relationship we seek and that we have worked hard to foster is not about a United States declaration about how and when it will intervene in the affairs of other American states. It’s about all of our countries viewing one another as equals, sharing responsibilities, cooperating on security issues, and adhering not to doctrine, but to the decisions that we make as partners to advance the values and the interests we share.”*

The proof of this declaration by Mr. Kerry will of course be in the pudding. The recent developments with CELAC where the sub hemisphere has determined to meet without the United States and Canada is a most interesting development. It parallels the Organization of American States but is much more Latin focused. The United States remains in a state of antipathy with Cuba. Cuba, although now welcomed back to the OAS has said it will not take the seat at the OAS table. CELAC includes Cuba.

Mr. Kerry's statements come against the bitter experience of Caricom in its work with the democratic forces in Haiti during the Presidency of Jean Bertrand Aristide. Caricom was asked to help and then Prime Minister P J Patterson of Jamaica was in the Chair. Caricom was with US and other developed country assistance helping with the dispute between Mr. Aristide and his opponents which was turning increasingly violent. Mr. Aristide had conceded all that the forces arrayed against him including the developed countries had asked. We went to the United Nations to ask for the protection of U N troops to save the elected government of Haiti. The U N equivocated and said no troops were available. Yet on the 29<sup>th</sup> February 2006, Colin Powell called me at my home to say that Mr. Aristide had taken refuge behind a U S Security mission and had resigned and was on his way to a destination unknown. Following his departure from Haiti, troops were suddenly available to restore order. It has left a bitter pill in the mouths of many of our Caricom leaders and the experience is less than ten years old.

In The Bahamas we say: " you only know me when you need me."

The other and more interesting public policy issue to watch in our relations with the United States is our policy both in the CELAC context and in the Caricom context to marijuana. In the Mexican/Caricom dialogue in Barbados last year, the then President of Mexico Filipe Calderon spoke to a new approach to anti-drug policy, one which takes a market approach rather than a law enforcement approach. It seeks the decriminalization or legalization of the use of marijuana with the appropriate regulation and taxes as opposed to the resources used to lock up young males and criminalizing them in the process without any hindrance to the use of drugs. The U S domestic market is also changing on this. Caricom has the issue of medical marijuana on its next agenda

for Heads of Government in St. Vincent. It remains to be seen whether the U.S. federal policy will change and what that will mean for the Caricom region. I say this because the U S relationship and interest in this region seems almost entirely based on national security and in particular antidrug interdiction.

The Latins are very much interested in the support of the Caribbean countries for their position on the islands they call the Malvinas also known as the Falklands, against the backdrop of our being former British colonies in the main and the supposed automatic support for the British position. This new CELAC relationship will be very important going forward.

I would suggest also that it will be helpful to this region and hemisphere if Mr. Kerry is able to translate his declaration into a more normal relationship with Cuba, particularly given the moves toward market reforms which are not evidenced in that latter country.

It would seem to make sense given that the United States have no such diplomatic issues with China. At a recent meeting in Trinidad 2013, the American Vice President made it clear that the United States had no objection to our relationships with China, and I believe the US view is very important. China has been clear about its objectives in the region. For the Caribbean, a region which is starved for capital, and with the traditional friends the U S, Canada and Europe either unable or unwilling to provide the capital locked into a cycle of low growth and high debt, China has been a savior.

The Chinese position was given in a paper Policy Paper On Latin America and The Caribbean. They are interested in acquisition of raw materials and in political cooperation to support the one China policy.



In exchange, they will support Latin America and the Caribbean in their national development goals and have set aside significant capital for access by the hemisphere to support that development.

Paragraph IV (5) of the paper reads as follows:

*“The Chinese Government will continue to strengthen coordination and cooperation on international issues with Latin American and Caribbean countries, and maintain regular consultation with them on major international and regional issues. The two sides will continue to support each other on such important issues as sovereignty and territorial integrity. China stands ready to work with Latin American and Caribbean countries to strengthen the role of the United Nations, make the international political and economic order more fair and equitable, promote democracy in international relations and uphold the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries, China supports a greater role of Latin American Countries in international affairs.”*

Throughout the conduct of international relations there is this constant refrain which looks to this region with what is often called a bloc of votes. One after the next country comes calling. They crowd our Council for Community and Foreign Relations Agenda (COFCOR) with requests for support for that candidacy or the next. The question is always as far as The Bahamas is concerned whether or not we use the numbers that we have to our sufficient advantage. It is not a rhetorical question.

I think the answer is obvious that we do not.

It makes the case for reform more urgent lest the parade passes us by.

The distinguished Foreign Minister of Trinidad and Tobago has made an urgent case for the expansion of Caricom to include all the countries and

territories in a paper in which he describes a Caribbean Sea Convergence. This convergence would encompass some 40 million people and ultimately will include in the short term the Dominican Republic, the French Territories including French Guyana and the Dutch ones, and in the longer term the American possessions and ultimately Cuba.

The idea is that unity is strength or as the Haitians would say: L'Union Fait La Force.

These matters are not simple or cheap. P.J. Patterson led the way in bringing Haiti into Caricom. Suriname is also a member. These nations do not speak English as a first language and Caricom has not been able thus far to ensure that documentation and conversations are available in the native languages of those countries. Imagine then including a Spanish speaking country.

Further, there continue to be tensions in relationships because Haiti is a source country for illegal migration. The Bahamas does not confer citizenship on people born in The Bahamas whose parents are not Bahamian. One consequence is that there are thousands of Haitians in The Bahamas who are undocumented and who have to be regularized in some way or fashion. Immigration enforcement in The Bahamas is becoming stricter. Our country is committed to working on a solution to this.

All of this makes the enterprise of fixing our internal arrangements at Caricom a priority.

Here is what Winston Dookeran, the Foreign Minister of Trinidad and Tobago said in his paper A New Frontier For Caribbean Convergence:

*“As noted earlier, Caricom integration was narrowly defined in terms of trade and markets, which is not a very accurate measure. The new perception of convergence needs to be understood as ‘a new economic space’ where there is partnership not just across the Caribbean Sea space, but also between the public and private sectors. It is forging of ‘a right partnership toward productive efficiency. Convergence therefore implies a partnership ( inclusiveness and cooperation) among public and private actors in the economies of the Caribbean sea emphasizing equality and equity as integral components.”*

Minister Dookeran goes on to list a number of arrangements and decisions which have to be taken, ought to be taken. I have mentioned already the inclusion of the new members. However, I want to parse some of his ideas and lead us into what I think is the inevitable conclusion.

He says in the Chapter Policy Execution and Outcomes Institutional Drivers Caribbean Sea Convergence

*“ Caricom Secretariat – is the principle administrative organ of Caricom... recommend a fast-track decision to facilitate the entry...”*

Anyone who knows Caricom and its decision making will know that the expression “ fast track ” and Caricom in no way comport. Yet mandates are piled upon the Secretariat which is the closest thing we have to an executive arm but which is resource starved and under manned.

Prime Minister Kenny Anthony speaking at the Chamber of Commerce in Barbados in October 2012 said this:

*“We know that we have too often asked our Secretariat to perform miracles without even the requisite loaves and fishes. Unable to deliver miracles, decisive action has been replaced by documentation - mountains of it - which most of us have neither the time nor the appetite to digest.”*

So whatever reforms are contemplated for Caricom and I agree the need for reform, amongst the issues: human resources and money.

Given the economic issues that face us, all treasuries and ministers of finance will be reluctant to agree to increases in subventions to Caricom. Indeed many nations struggle to pay the existing duties. However, one suggestion is that there ought to be in each country a specific set aside, a revenue stream which goes straight to Caricom and its agencies as a means of ensuring the funding at the appropriate levels. Further that the Human Resources issues can be helped by the Foreign Ministries and Foreign Trade Ministries indeed the public service generally seconding officers to Caricom as part of the public service careers for officers which service would be part of the permanent and pensionable establishment in their countries as a means to ensure that the best talent ends up working there. Indeed, The Bahamas has led the way by already offering that possibility to at least two public servants per year on secondment to the Secretariat.

In terms of the decision making, clearly nations will have to bite the bullet to give stronger powers to the Secretariat to ensure that decisions are executed. Those who argue on sovereignty will do well to remember the saying of Dame Biller Miller of Barbados, that you cannot approbate and reprobate at the same time.

With regard to the convergence paper by Mr. Dookeran, I am also proud to say that we in The Bahamas recognize this need for convergence. Within our own country, the Prime Minister has embraced the three PPPs. In Bimini, the island in The Bahamas closest to the U S mainland there is an investment which will require a significant upgrade to the international airport. The private investor is doing the upgrade to the government's specifications but the cost will be recaptured by credits given for taxes collected on the investment. It is this kind of creative financing that will invigorate economies around the region and is to be recommended for its efficiency and simplicity and speed, with minimum impact on the public purse but exponential benefits to the public good.

This brings me to my pet peeve, the nature and culture of our decision making around the region. It is manifested in the suggestions which The Bahamas advances each year on the length for example of opening ceremonies of Caricom gatherings. Try as we might, those ceremonies continue to take far too long and interfere in my respectful view in the timely dispatch of the work of the body. That is just symptomatic of what I call the deliberative nature of our culture.

In other words, we like to talk.

Mr. Anthony in the Chamber address again says:

*"The simple truth is that decision making, especially in the all critical area of trade when time is of essence, has become cumbersome, layered, and bureaucratic. For instance, it takes months to get a decision from COTED and by the time the decision arrives the reason for the request*

*ceases to be relevant, or the situation which necessitated the request has so deteriorated that the initial solution is no longer the answer to the problem.”*

Those who are familiar with the negotiations on the Carib/Can agreement will know of which the Prime Minister speaks.

In our meetings and visits, we are fond of invoking the Singapore model for development. However, we must realize as Sam Huntington, the Harvard Professor makes clear in his seminal work Political Order in Changing Societies that there is a tradeoff between rapid development and growth on the one hand and democracy on the other. That trade-off seems to be that if you want rapid growth and development at the same time, then you have to move toward a more authoritarian model of governance. That may work in Asia but I dare say is inimical to the way we do business in the region. However, something must be done to reduce the amount of words expended and to increase the level of action and dispatch.

So now can I pull all of this together in some coherent way.

It is clear that The Bahamas and I think that the Caricom project has much to recommend itself.

I have said in another context that if Caricom did not exist, it would have to be invented. There is no more efficient way to conduct ourselves as small countries but in some sort of multinational supra body that will deal with the old traditional world powers.

Caricom for good or ill is that body. There has been too much concentration on the issues of market and economy and not enough on how we actually function and how our people actually succeed and work together.

Clearly in terms of institutional arrangements The Bahamas has some way to go in convincing its public that this is a good religion to adopt but I think we are mainly there. We have put our money where our mouth is.

As we say in our country: “talk is cheap; money buy land.”

I want to borrow from the convergence model and suggest a couple of items that ought to be carried out with dispatch.

In this summary, I mention first of all the strengthening of the powers and human resources of the Secretariat and more reliable and dedicated funding mechanisms.

Secondly, the closer coordination of the foreign policy of Caricom to leverage the number of votes we have in international bodies for the benefit of the region.

I recall the recent visit to the region of a Canadian Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs who came to remind The Bahamas and other Caricom countries that they should not support a mooted push by Qatar to move the headquarters of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) from Montreal to Doha because of our traditional friendship. It was a very interesting statement given the difficulty our nations often have when seeking to get results in Ottawa, even a simple meeting with public officials or resolving the tortuous issues of visas for our students.

Leveraging in this context should become a fine art for Caricom.

I also believe that we ought to have a more structured approach in our relations with the United States. One idea is for greater access of our young people into the tertiary level institutions of that country with a right to live and work there in pursuit of training opportunities.

Thirdly, I call for a specific focus on the development of young people including a commitment to double the investment in education over the next five years.

Fourthly, that our ministers of culture, trade and finance continue to build on ways to improve the ability of youngsters to use their raw talents to build wealth for this region.

I recall a seventeen year old from Britain who was hailed as a genius because he made millions from an app which he invented. I pointed out that we have that same genius in the Caribbean but perhaps we do not recognize it.

Did not Usain Bolt, a young man from Jamaica, come from poor and humble circumstances and using his talent, this genius, transform his life into one that is worth a fortune? And, in the process, he lifted the collective spirit of Jamaica out of despair. I worry about him and others who emulate him; that they are not taken advantage of by the commercial hucksters of this life. Encouraging the Bolts of this world, nurturing them, supporting them, educating them, protecting them; that is a role that Governments can do by their policies.

Not only is this true in sports but in all cultural spheres including music, drama and the arts.

This is a mission which former Prime Minister Patterson speaks to with some urgency.

Fifthly, I believe that we ought to declare a state of emergency in relation to the development of boys and men. We cannot continue along the path of the dysfunctions which now obtain across our societies where so many men and boys are not participating in the society but instead embrace a life of violence and crime or a lack of “*stickability*”. I say this



with the greatest of respect and honour to the millions of men and boys who do get it and who do succeed but we must reach back and help to lift our fallen brothers. Our women too should recognize the urgency of this problem even as they take their rightful place in society. They have an interest in resolving this issue as well.

I am asking that Caricom embrace this as a priority in fixing our problems. We will not regret it.

Finally, we must all commit to telling the Caricom story. This means people to people engagement, improved and increased travel and transportation links. The leaders themselves should travel and interact in the jurisdictions of the other. It is to build that chemistry about which Kenny Anthony spoke.

When I was Opposition spokesman on Foreign Affairs during the period 2007 to 2012, I continued to travel to the region and pay official calls on governments and Opposition leaders. There was a look of consternation often on the faces of many when I visited. There was apoplexy back in the capital by my political opponents at home. However, I wanted to lead by example. Caricom must be a continuing project and enterprise in or out of government. The project is both formal and informal. What may be posited about that project is that its success is ensured by turning specialized functions into localized actions the region over.

Lastly, I mention again the need to revisit the charter and to reflect the broader embrace of the issues and begin the conversation on public policy and sexual orientation as one of the characteristics for which there can be no discrimination.

There are a number of other important public policy issues which require focus. Clearly these would include climate change and our continued dependence on fossil fuels, transportation and migration which must be solved. The commonalities of dependence and vulnerability within the context of energy and climate change make these policy developments imperative.

However, I believe if we fix the problems of structure and decision making and human rights issues, our ability to resolve the others will follow. In any event, I have spoken too long and it is time to stop. In our country we say: "*you must talk some and keep some.*" The process of saving Caricom is ongoing. Each generation is called to take the project further. I would not urge despair.

Kamau Brathwaite, the Barbadian writer reminds us in *Negus*:

*It is not enough to be free  
of the whips, principalities and powers.*

*where is your kingdom of the word...*

*It is not enough to be free  
of malaria fevers of the hurricane,  
fear of invasions, crops' drought, fire's*

*blister upon the cane...*

*It is not enough to be able to fly to Miami,  
structure skyscrapers, excavate the moon-*

*scaped seashore sands*

*to build hotels, casinos, sepulchres...*

*It is not enough*

*to be pause, to be hole*

*to be void, to be silent*

*to be semicolon, to be semicolony...*

To which I add a loud HALLEUJAH AND AMEN!

Once again, I am deeply grateful for this invitation to speak here this evening.

Thank you and good evening.

end