

(10 May 2003)

**COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE SIXTH MEETING
OF THE COUNCIL FOR FOREIGN AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS, 8-9 MAY
2003, KINGSTOWN, ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

The Sixth Meeting of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) was held in Kingstown, St Vincent on 8-9 May, 2003. The Ministers attending were: the Hon Frederick Mitchell, Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Public Service, The Bahamas; the Hon Godfrey Smith, Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Belize; the Hon. Elvin Nimrod, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Affairs, Grenada; the Hon. F.O. Riviere, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Marketing, Dominica; Hon. S. R. Insanally, OR, CCH, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Guyana; the Hon Joseph Phillipe Antonio, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Haiti; the Hon. K.D Knight, QC, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Jamaica; Dr the Hon. Timothy Harris, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Education, St. Kitts and Nevis; Sen. the Hon. Julian R Hunte, OBE, Minister of External Affairs, International Trade and Civil Aviation, Saint Lucia; the Hon. Louis Straker, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade, St. Vincent and the Grenadines; the Hon Maria Levens, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Suriname; and Sen. the Hon. Knowlson Gift, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago.

Also representing their respective countries were: Ambassador Colin Murdoch, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Antigua and Barbuda; and, Ambassador Teresa Marshall, Permanent Secretary (Foreign Affairs), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Barbados.

OPENING CEREMONY

In his Opening Remarks, the Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Mr. Edwin Carrington, noted that this Meeting of the COFCOR had a formidable task before it, given the many burning regional and international issues to which the Community looked to the COFCOR for guidance.

Mr. Carrington alluded to the revised foreign policy strategy which he said, "*lies at the heart of our existence as a Community*" and continued that "*this strategic framework will underpin efforts to achieve one of the main objectives of the Community, namely the enhanced coordination of Member States' foreign and foreign economic policies*" as provided for in the Revised Treaty.

He reminded the meeting of the statement issued by the Heads of Government last April with respect to the post-Iraq situation which stated *inter alia* that "*The Caribbean Community, as a grouping of small states and an integral part of the international community, must continue to rely heavily on the United Nations, the primacy of international law, and adherence to international obligations for the protection of its sovereignty, territorial integrity and the furtherance of its interests.*"

In his address, the Outgoing Chairman, Sen. the Hon. Julian R. Hunte, Minister of External Affairs, International Trade and Civil Aviation of Saint Lucia, said his year as Chairman of the COFCOR had, not unexpectedly, been fast-paced and challenging.

Even before the negative impact on the economies of the Community had been overcome, new difficulties had emerged from the repercussions of the war in Iraq. Added to this is the new threat of the SARS virus. These developments have deepened the vulnerability of our Region to external forces over which we have no control, he stated.

Minister Hunte said that the United Nations remained of significant importance to the small states of the Caribbean. Many, he said, including the countries of our Region, were deeply concerned by threats to the UN and multilateralism. He however noted that there were other issues of concern, particularly the development agenda that must be addressed at the United Nations as that organisation seeks to implement the commitments agreed at the Special Summits and High level Conferences held since 1992.

Minister Hunte, in referring to his imminent assumption of the Presidency of the United Nations General Assembly stated that the post being held by a small developing country would also serve to highlight the concerns of those states.

The Chairman of COFCOR, Hon. Louis Straker, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, told the gathering in his feature address that it was in the collective self-interest of the Community's Member States to seek out partnerships for peace and security. *“As small open economies we stand to suffer greatly from international discord of a military or economic kind. We must however stand firm on principle and speak out against evils, wherever they exist,”* he stressed.

Minister Straker called for an examination of intra-community relations, in the spirit of openness and frankness befitting members of one Caribbean family, and celebrating the 30th Anniversary of CARICOM. The Community he said, had always subscribed to the principles of respect for human rights, sovereignty and territorial integrity and the rule of international law.

“We will be failing in our duty, if we do not speak out about any infringement of these principles, particularly within our Region,” he emphasized.

TRIBUTE TO MR. WALTER SISULU

Ministers took the opportunity to express the Community's deep sorrow at the passing of Mr. Walter Sisulu, father figure of the African National Congress and hero of the liberation movement of South Africa. They conveyed condolences to Mr. Sisulu's family and the Government and people of South Africa.

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS

Ministers reviewed recent developments in international relations. In that context, they expressed concern at actions which constituted a disregard for international law and the collective security system of the United Nations. They emphasised the importance of the United Nations in the process of multilateralism and in the protection of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of small states.

Ministers discussed recent developments in the international trade negotiations in which the Region was currently involved.

With regard to the ongoing negotiations in the World Trade Organisation, they regretted that progress remained slow in areas of special interest to developing countries, including, *inter alia*, those relating to special and differential treatment; Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights and Public Health in particular access to affordable medicines; Agriculture; and the Work Programme for Small Economies.

With regard to the ACP-EU negotiations for Economic Partnership Agreements under the Cotonou Agreement, the Ministers noted that there were still differences in the approach to these negotiations between the ACP and EU. The Ministers were informed of the steps which are being taken by the Region to prepare itself for Phase II of the EPA Negotiations with the EU including an exchange of views with EU Commissioner Lamy in February 2003 and a CARIFORUM Ministerial strategy session which was held in Barbados on 2 May 2003.

In assessing the developments in the negotiations towards the establishment of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the Ministers noted the recent changes in the political and economic environment in the hemisphere. They were advised of the status of market access negotiations. In this context, they recognized that it may be necessary to re-examine the scope and timetable for the creation of the FTAA with a view to either extending the deadline for the completion of the negotiations or, designing a less ambitious Agreement by 2005. They agreed that in the on-going negotiations, the Region should continue to advocate for the establishment of a Regional Integration Fund to assist the smaller economies to participate more effectively in the FTAA.

In discussing other issues on the international agenda of interest to CARICOM and other small states, the Ministers called for action to be taken to implement the outcomes of Doha, Monterrey and Johannesburg, and the Millennium Development Goals.

They also discussed the new threat of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and its potential negative impact on the health and economy of the global population, exacerbating the impact already being caused to economic and social development by the continuing threat of HIV/AIDS. They supported the efforts of the Ministers of Health of the Region in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to prevent and minimize the threats of these diseases to the societies of the Caribbean. Ministers commended the precautionary work being undertaken by the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) and the Ministries of

Health of CARICOM Member States; and noted that, to date, there had been no reported cases of SARS in the Caribbean.

IRAQ

Ministers recalled the statements of 15 February and 14 April 2003, on the crisis in Iraq, made by the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community and, in particular, the mandate given to the COFCOR by Heads of Government to monitor developments. In keeping with that mandate the Ministers exchanged views on the evolving situation.

CARICOM's position on the Iraq crisis, which was shared by a majority of the member states of the United Nations, was based firmly on principle. This position was however at variance with that of members of the Coalition, which includes some of CARICOM's closest allies. The Ministers concluded that these differences of opinion should not lead to prolonged tension or damage to the excellent relations which the CARICOM democracies share with these major partners.

Ministers were of the firm view that the efforts of the international community should now be focused on the future. In this regard, they emphasized the urgency of implementing a comprehensive programme for the reconstruction of Iraq, giving priority to the humanitarian plight of the Iraqi people. In this effort, the United Nations must be accorded a central role.

Ministers also strongly reaffirmed the continued relevance of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security, and renewed their commitment to work with like-minded states to reassert the value of multilateralism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations as a forum where all states, both large and small, could play an equal part.

Ministers emphasised the urgent need to heal the rifts in international relations triggered by the Iraq crisis and called upon all states to rely on the strength of diplomacy in reconciling differences without rancour or retribution. They were convinced that a genuine commitment to democratic principles would facilitate the process for a renewed spirit of cooperation, collaboration and trust among states.

In this regard, Ministers identified as a priority the strengthening of ties with traditional friends and a reinvigorated dialogue based on shared values, friendship and openness with historic allies, particularly those in the hemisphere.

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT (ICC)

Ministers welcomed the inauguration of the International Criminal Court in March 2003 and the installation of the Judges including Justice Karl Hudson-Phillips, Q.C. of Trinidad and Tobago. They recalled the role played by CARICOM, spearheaded by Trinidad and Tobago, in promoting the establishment of the ICC and reaffirmed the

Region's commitment to the preservation of the integrity and effective functioning of the Court in accordance with the Rome Statute.

Ministers discussed proposals from the United States for bilateral agreements designed to exempt US citizens from the jurisdiction of the ICC (so-called Article 98 Agreements) and in this connection and at the request of the US Government, met with the US Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Mr. Stephen Rademaker, for an exchange on this matter.

THE ORGANISATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS)

Ministers discussed preparations for the forthcoming thirty-third regular session of the OAS General Assembly scheduled for 8-10 June 2003 in Santiago, Chile. They noted that this Assembly will take place at a critical time, when the effectiveness and relevance of the Inter-American system are being increasingly questioned. In this regard, they stressed the urgent need for this Assembly to re-assess the Organisation's role and capabilities.

Ministers called on the OAS to adequately address the development issues of member states.

Ministers recognised the contribution made by CARICOM in taking a principled and united stance on issues within the OAS.

HEMISPHERIC SECURITY

Ministers reaffirmed their decision to emphasise in hemispheric and international fora, the multifaceted dimensions of security, including its physical, economic, social, environmental and political aspects, and the special security concerns of small states.

They recalled that this topic had been discussed at the 32nd OAS General Assembly in Barbados and at the OAS Second High Level Meeting on "*The special security concerns of small island states*" in St Vincent and the Grenadines, and that "*Security in the Greater Caribbean*", in its multifaceted aspects, had been selected as one of the main topics for the political dialogue at the 4th Summit meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the ACS to be held in Panama on 2-3 November 2003.

They also noted that the OAS Special Conference on Security had been re-scheduled for a date to be fixed in the last quarter of this year in Mexico City, and decided that CARICOM would fully participate at this Conference and promote the concept of the multidimensional aspects of security, in particular as it relates to small states.

Ministers received a proposal relating to the convening of an international conference for the Caribbean on combating crime and agreed to establish a working group to determine the feasibility of the project.

SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS (SOA)

Ministers recalled the decision taken at the Fourteenth Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government in February 2003 that CARICOM Member States should participate in the Special Summit of the Americas now scheduled for the final quarter of this year in Mexico.

They viewed the Summit as an opportunity to advance regional issues and to re-engage the hemisphere at the highest political level in a shared vision for the creation of a hemispheric community which provides enhanced opportunities for the progressive economic and social development of all its peoples.

RELATIONS WITH CANADA

Ministers reiterated the value that CARICOM places on the special relationship it has traditionally enjoyed with Canada and acknowledged that country's great contribution to the integration movement from its very inception.

Ministers observed that under the leadership of Prime Minister Jean Chretien, the political and economic ties between the Region and Canada have been greatly enhanced.

RELATIONS WITH CENTRAL AMERICA

Ministers discussed a proposal to further strengthen the relationship between the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Central American Integration System (SICA), which received a stimulus with the convening of the First CARICOM-SICA Summit in Belize in February 2002.

In this regard, they acknowledged the pivotal role which could be played by Belize as Pro Tempore President of the Central American Integration System, a position to which it will accede on 1 July 2003.

They attached importance to the finalisation of the Framework for a Plan of Action mandated by the Summit.

They looked forward to the conclusion of a CARICOM-Costa Rica Free Trade Agreement initialed in March 2003.

RELATIONS WITH CUBA

In the course of reviewing the Region's relations with Cuba, Ministers agreed to issue a Statement on developments in Cuba which is attached.

RELATIONS WITH CHILE

Ministers discussed the Community's relations with Chile and that country's role in hemispheric and international economic, commercial and political arenas. Ministers recorded CARICOM's appreciation for the continued commitment of Chile to its technical assistance programme with CARICOM. They supported the convening of the inaugural meeting of the CARICOM-Chile Joint Commission at the Ministerial level in Santiago de Chile

RELATIONS WITH MEXICO

Ministers exchanged views with his Excellency Dr. Luis Ernesto Debrez Bautista, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mexico on issues of mutual international and hemispheric interest. They noted that a number of major conferences will be taking place in Mexico over the next twelve months which are of great importance to the Member States of CARICOM and at which it is expected that the Region will be represented at the highest levels.

RELATIONS WITH THE USA

Ministers reiterated their commitment to strengthening the close and mutually beneficial relations that have always existed between CARICOM and the United States.

Ministers acknowledged that there will always be issues on which CARICOM and the US will take divergent positions. CARICOM however remains committed to engaging the US on all issues. In keeping with the sentiments expressed recently by the US Secretary of State Colin Powell to the CARICOM Foreign Ministers, it will do so "*in an open and robust dialogue befitting our close ties and common values*".

Ministers stressed CARICOM's commitment to promoting the partnership with the United States that was envisaged in the Bridgetown Accord, and to working closely with the United States in the progressive development of the safe, stable and prosperous neighbourhood envisaged in the Third Border Initiative. In this regard, CARICOM will continue to cooperate with the United States in the fight against terrorism and other transnational crimes, to enhance security, and to accelerate the economic and social development of our common neighbourhood.

RELATIONS WITH SPAIN

Ministers welcomed the opportunity provided for CARICOM and Spain to engage in a political dialogue and also to inaugurate the CARICOM-Spain Joint Commission in November 2002.

They looked forward to the activation of the Technical Cooperation Agreement which was signed during the meeting of the Joint Commission for enhanced cooperation between the two sides.

Ministers further welcomed the fact that the Quick Consult Mechanism established at the Second CARICOM-Spain Summit in May 2002 had proven useful in communicating the Region's views on a number of issues.

RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM

Ministers reviewed the Region's relations with the United Kingdom. They noted that the CARICOM-United Kingdom Transmission Mechanism is a valuable channel for a two-way communication between the Region and the UK, and expressed their satisfaction at the effective way in which this Mechanism is being used to exchange views on matters of importance to both parties.

They looked forward to meeting with the UK Foreign Secretary at the Fourth Meeting of the UK-Caribbean Forum in London in 2004.

RELATIONS WITH THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Ministers welcomed the progress made in the Community's relationship with the Russian Federation following fruitful discussions held at the First Ministerial Meeting between the COFCOR and the Russian Foreign Minister in September 2002 in New York. With a view to strengthening the relationship, Ministers agreed that a draft Protocol on the Establishment of a Political Dialogue Mechanism between CARICOM and the Russian Federation currently under consideration, should be finalized as quickly as possible.

RELATIONS WITH JAPAN

Ministers expressed satisfaction at progress made in the implementation of the commitments which were made under the Framework Agreement for Cooperation which was signed between CARICOM and Japan at the First CARICOM-Japan Ministerial Meeting in November 2002. They noted that the Second Ministerial Meeting is scheduled to take place in Antigua and Barbuda in November 2003 and looked forward to meeting with their colleague Foreign Minister of Japan.

RIO GROUP

Ministers reviewed the recent activities of the Rio Group and the issues which had been engaging the attention of that body.

They reaffirmed their support for the Rio Group as an effective mechanism for political consultation in Latin America and in that regard they viewed as important CARICOM's membership of the Group.

ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)

Ministers discussed the preparations for the 4th Summit of the ACS scheduled to take place in Panama in November 2003 that will coincide with the centenary of Panama's nationhood.

Ministers expressed their satisfaction that ACS Member States had agreed on a draft ACS Multilateral Air Transport Agreement. They urged Member States to ensure that relevant national procedures are completed in time to enable signature at the 4th Summit.

Ministers agreed that there was need to finalise the consultative processes within CARICOM and between CARICOM and the ACS on the outstanding issues related to the Convention Establishing the Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Caribbean, with a view to having the Convention enter into force at an early date.

Ministers agreed to support Jamaica's candidature for the Chairmanship of the ACS Ministerial Council for the period 2003-2004.

UNITED NATIONS

Ministers reviewed the range of issues which will engage the attention of the international community over the next year at the United Nations. Of particular interest to the Community are the Special Meeting on HIV/AIDS in September 2002, the World Summit on the Information Society to be held in Geneva in December 2003 and Tunis in 2005 and the SIDS+10 meeting to be held in Mauritius in August 2004 from which they anticipate results beneficial to developing countries.

Ministers also reiterated the Community's full support for the process established to advance the work relating to the integrated management of the Caribbean Sea.

PRESIDENCY OF THE 58TH SESSION OF THE UNGA

Ministers reiterated the Region's full support for the candidature of Senator the Honourable Julian R. Hunte, OBE, Minister of External Affairs, International Trade and Civil Aviation of Saint Lucia, for election to the Presidency of the 58th Session of the UN General Assembly. This candidature is of considerable importance to the Region.

CANDIDATURE FOR ELECTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

Ministers endorsed the candidature of Judge Mohamed Shahabuddeen for election to the International Court of Justice during the 60th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2005.

NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT

Ministers reaffirmed the significance of the Non-Aligned Movement in world affairs and considered what role it could play in the changing international environment.

THE SITUATION IN HAITI

Ministers were given presentations by Ministers from Saint Lucia and The Bahamas on the visit of a High Level OAS/CARICOM delegation from March 19-21 2003. They also noted the recommendations that the delegation submitted to the Permanent Council of the OAS at a Special Session on Haiti on 30 April 2003.

Ministers heard also the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Haiti who explained the steps taken by the Haitian authorities and the constraints inherent in the efforts made by the Government of Haiti to comply with the provisions of Resolution 822.

Ministers reiterated that all the parties concerned must honour their obligations under this Resolution which remains a valid and relevant instrument for a successful process of normalization in Haiti. They urged the international community to give full consideration to the early resumption of financial cooperation with Haiti to avoid the imminent occurrence of a humanitarian disaster. In this context, they commended Trinidad and Tobago and The Bahamas for their pledge to participate in a joint financial initiative to clear the arrears of Haiti to the IDB.

BORDER ISSUES

Belize-Guatemala

Ministers received an update on recent developments in Belize-Guatemala relations. They welcomed the conclusion of the OAS supported facilitation process which resulted in the submission on 16 September 2002, of a comprehensive set of proposals which provide a solid basis for a peaceful, just and definitive resolution to the long-standing border dispute.

Ministers noted the signature on 7 February 2003, of an agreement between Belize and Guatemala which established a transition process and put in place confidence building measures designed to maintain peace, stability and neighbourly relations between the Parties, pending the final settlement of the territorial dispute.

Ministers called on the international community to offer support to the Parties and to the OAS, in the fulfillment of the Process.

Ministers re-affirmed their support for the maintenance of Belize's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Guyana-Venezuela

Ministers welcomed the ongoing efforts being made by Guyana and Venezuela to strengthen their bilateral relations.

They noted with satisfaction that the recent visit of the Venezuelan Foreign Minister, His Excellency Roy Chaderton Matos, had resulted in a renewed commitment by both countries to the continuation of dialogue and to the early convening of meetings under the aegis of the United Nations Secretary-General, the acceleration of functional cooperation within the Guyana/Venezuela High Level Bilateral Commission, and the forging of expanded trade and economic links.

Ministers reaffirmed their unswerving support for Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as its right to develop all its natural resources.

Bird Rock

Ministers reviewed the foreign policy implications of the situation regarding Bird Rock and its attendant maritime boundary delimitation issues which arise between Venezuela and several CARICOM Member States of the Eastern Caribbean.

APPRECIATION

Ministers extended their deep appreciation to the Government and people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines for the warm hospitality extended and for the excellent arrangements that were made and which facilitated greatly the smooth conduct of the meeting.

DATE AND VENUE

Ministers accepted the offer of Barbados to host the Seventh Meeting of the COFCOR in that country on 6-7 May 2004.

9 May 2003

Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines