



Integration: Our key to prosperity

**By Senator the Honourable Donald Rhodd
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The Caribbean family has come together to observe the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, which established the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). This historic occasion has been marked by several activities including this regional quiz competition.

There is much to celebrate, not the least of which is the fact that CARICOM is the longest surviving integration arrangement in the world among developing countries. The theme for the 30th anniversary celebrations is “Integration: Our Key to Prosperity”. This theme is indicative of the value we Caribbean people have placed on our integration. We can proudly say that cricket and the University of the West Indies (UWI), are no longer the only factors that foster unity among Caribbean countries, although for many including me, cricket is still the most powerful.

Culture also serves to bring us together in a potpourri of expressions, each Caribbean island adding a distinctive flavour, but cooking something that represents the total Caribbean people in the international arena. Many of you are too young to remember “Janie and har sista from Manchester, who buck up a CARIFESTA” and danced “all night till day light”. That was when Jamaica hosted the Caribbean Festival of Arts in 1976 and I believe the song was written by the late Jacob “Killa” Miller. But, the point I am trying to make is that CARIFESTA, which is one of the proud achievements of CARICOM, has provided for the artistes of the region a stage on which they can display their talents. It is that base of a shared cultural experience that has ensured that we keep faith with the imperative of integration.

Carnival is another rich Caribbean experience that binds us together in shared experience, whether it’s Crop Over in Barbados, or Mas’ in Trinidad, or Jamaica Carnival. The notion of shared identity is captured in Earl Lovelace’s “The Dragon Can’t Dance”: “Dance! There is dancing in the calypso. Dance! If the words mourn the death of a neighbour, the music insists that you dance; if it tells the troubles of a brother, the music says dance. Dance to the hurt! Dance! If you catching hell, dance! and the Government don’t care, dance! Your woman take your money and run away with another man, dance. Dance! Dance! Dance! It is in dancing that you

ward off evil. Dancing is a chant that cuts the power from the devil. Dance! Dance! Dance! Carnival brings this dancing to every crevice of the hill.”

This controversial artform provides emotional escape for many of us. For a brief stint we can escape from the drudgery of work; from the realities of Martin Carter’s “Dark Time” into the world of Derek Walcott’s “Mass Man” or Earl Lovelace’s “Dragon”, dancing away our troubles, while eroding class, colour and creed. Then of course in the area of education, we have demonstrated our mettle by forging a Caribbean curriculum with an examination that bears relevance to the unique experience of our Caribbean students, while not losing its applicability to the wider world. We are proud that our students can hold their own in any North American, British-based or indeed any other university considered among the best because they have had a solid and sustainable foundation in a Caribbean institution.

According to our Minister of Education, Youth and Culture, the Honourable Maxine Henry-Wilson, in a recent CARICOM lecture, we are islands and peoples who have displayed unmatched resilience, who have proved that we can be the best at whatever we want to be: Best playwrights like Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott; best folk poet like the Honourable Louise Bennett-Coverly; best creators of dance like Lavina Williams; best artistes like the Honourable Robert Nesta Marley; best social commentators like the Mighty Sparrow. We can be world class, given the appropriate conditions.

Our elements of unity are growing even stronger with the advent of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME). According to Barbados’ Prime Minister, the Honourable Owen Arthur, “The creation of a Caribbean Single Market is the most complex, the most ambitious and the most difficult enterprise ever contemplated in our region...” (*The Caribbean Single Market and Economy – The Way Forward; April 23, 2004*). And he’s probably right, for to establish the CSME means taking 15 participating economies stretching from Belize in the west to Suriname in the east and reconstituting them as a single market and a single economy and this is no mean feat.

But we are convinced that with the strength, embodied in our history, our shared recreational experiences and our resolve to unite around common goals and objectives; I submit that we can successfully establish the CSME by the year 2005. It is this same strength that will also enable us to further deepen and strengthen relations among all CARICOM members on our way to prosperity for all.

The benefits to be derived from the CSME far outweigh the challenges we may encounter.

- We will have a stronger power base for international negotiations.
- We will have easier access to larger and many more markets.
- The CSME will allow for the free movement of people and stronger cultural fusion.
- It will allow for the harmonisation and elevation of quality, as well as of accreditation standards.
- In this world where the consumer is king, it will provide us with a wider range of goods and services from which to choose.
- It will also improve our ability to recruit skilled workers from across the region, and
- Also enhance our ability to outsource production components.

I hope that I have not pre-empted a question from the quizmaster.

A survey conducted by Professor Neville Duncan of the UWI has indicated that Jamaicans are in favour of deepening the integration process beyond the reservations and condemnation of some of our political leaders. And I would like to echo the sentiments of Professor Duncan when he said: “May we not lose this high ground advantage to those who would promote stifling narrow nationalism. Our size is not a deterrent; our limited resources are a challenge, but not an obstacle, for we have an indomitable spirit and a drive that transcends obstacles and challenges.”

And so I want to congratulate the organisers of this regional quiz as they seek to foster effective integration among Caribbean youth. The imperative for students in operating in a borderless region is to know and understand your neighbours and their cultures very well. It is also to be able to be the best when competing with your neighbours in the job market, in sport and in regional quizzes such as this. Participation in this exercise will, therefore, help to broaden your understanding of CARICOM member states, while you celebrate your similarities and embrace your peculiarities. We are as different as we are similar. I believe our Jamaican Motto — Out of Many, One People — is a most apt descriptor of the region. I would have loved to see our Spanish-speaking neighbours — Cuba — participating in this exercise as well and I hope that the day is not far away when this becomes a reality as we attempt to break down barriers that prevent us from being a stronger region.

I have noted that the focus of the 30th anniversary celebrations is on youth and that there have been several activities geared toward the involvement of Caribbean youth. This is indeed a signal that the CARICOM family has recognised the critical role that our young people will play in the future of our region. It is this recognition that has prompted Caribbean Heads of Government to be creating opportunities for youth empowerment and development. Our own National Youth Policy is a demonstration of our Government's commitment to pay close attention to the cries and issues relating to the Jamaican young people. You must seize the opportunity to fashion what lies beyond the new horizon. But, to do so you must accept the responsibility that comes with the opportunities.

I would like to commend all the schools from the region and in particular, Immaculate Conception High School from Jamaica, represented here by Stacy, Shari and Danielle participating in the second zonal round of the regional competition. I believe it is C L R James in "The Birth of a Nation" who laments "Nobody knows what the Caribbean population is capable of. Nobody has even attempted to find out." Not so anymore, we have capable students such as you who will keep us on the map of the world by your outstanding performances wherever you go and in whatever capacities you serve.

It is in times like these, that we must show our resoluteness and demonstrate to ourselves and to the world that moving forward together gives us the strength to face and overcome any challenge. The future of the Caribbean and the integration process is in your hands. And I am confident that they are capable hands. I am confident that the next generation of CARICOM, that is you, will continue the process of drawing us even closer to the ideal of viability, sustainability and prosperity.

Competitors, may I impress upon you the notion that it is not winning that counts, but how you play the game. That piece of advice is good enough for Belize, Dominica, Montserrat, Anguila and St Kitts and the Nevis. But, I am sure that the Jamaican team is not accepting that from me so I'd like to say, play the game well; demonstrate the class act sportsmanship for which you are capable, BUT Jamaica: Play to Win!

For as I recall, in the stormy period of the Federation, the then Prime Minister of Trinidad & Tobago said: "One from ten equals nought," referring to Jamaica's decision to withdraw from the Federation. That statement still speaks eloquently and resoundingly of our resilience and strength as a member state. It still stands as

confession from the rest of the islands of the dominance of Jamaica in sports, academics, culture and politics in the region.

Moreover, today you play on your turf. Unleash that spirit! Have fun while you play; but play to win!

Finally, I leave you with strong words from the Minister of Education, Youth and Culture: We have created our culture. Our culture has in turn created us. We are the spirit of our ancestors. We are Tacky and Nanny; we are Garvey and Maceo in shining stirrup for the betterment of our people; we are Anansy and we are Actor Boy, Marti and Toussaint; we are Haiti in majestic splendour; we are Caribbean in all our glory. May our culture inspire us to action in the interest of our people and the advancement of the Community.

**Presentated to CARICOM Regional Quiz
Competition to mark its 30th anniversary Wednesday,
May 12, 2004.**