

871st Meeting of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors

Introductory Remarks

Ambassador Dr. Len Monica Ishmael: Missions of the ECS

Greetings

Mr. Secretary General, Chairman of the Committee of Ambassadors, Dean of the Committee of Ambassadors, Fellow Ambassadors: It is an honor and privilege to address you today in this forum for the first time as Ambassador of the Eastern Caribbean States. My intervention comes at a time of great challenge, instability, transition and change, not only for the community of the world's nations, but also for this family gathered here today as we seek to navigate turbulent seas in support of the member states whose interests we serve and together attempt to reshape the contours of this institution to ensure its continuing relevance in the times ahead.

As the incoming freshman of this family, it would be artifice to suggest that I possess the intimate, nuanced knowledge and understanding of the plethora of ACP operations, mandates, responsibilities and relationships that would enable me to engage with you today in some form of discourse on the specificity of ACP matters. I enter this august body however during times that are tumultuous, yet interesting and dynamic; times which have shaped the world view of the member states which I represent and which undoubtedly will influence and shape the future of the ACP as it seeks to redefine itself. It is to the importance of these times in challenging us to redefine our journeys individually and collectively that I now wish to devote the next few moments of my intervention.

Unarguably, the world, as we know it has changed. Upheaval and uncertainty are the hallmarks of these times. The destabilizing effects of the global financial crisis continue to plague many - if not all - of the member states in this room and the process of recovery has yet to gain traction in my region.

The collapse of the integrated financial markets has unleashed more than just a financial crisis. It has shaken the world to its core - in the process blurring the ideological divide and changing the language of our times. Today the concepts of "capitalism" and "socialism" can no longer be quite so rigidly defined. The words "bailout" and "donor" are no longer applicable solely to countries of the south or north; austerity measures formerly the day to day experience of many in our countries are now the bitter reality for many in the developed world; the lines between First and Third World are grey - no longer quite so easy to define, and, in an ironic reversal of fortunes, the former "South" for much of this crisis - fueled the "North" out of recession. Today its members are demanding a voice in global affairs equal to their economic weight as the new global economic architecture continues to evolve and take shape.

The domino effects sparked by the financial crisis and social movements across parts of the Arab and western worlds point to a world interconnected and interdependent as never before; people from all walks of life, young and old, from east and west, have taken to the streets demanding more of a say in the decisions which determine their future. Today we witness intensified international cooperation unmatched since the efforts of the post Second World War in designing a global governance order through specific programs and institutions except that today, the actors are more numerous, asymmetric and cooperation spans the globe. This is certainly evident when we pause to consider the rampant and ruinous effects of climate change and the response - global in scope, which is required to address and adapt to its consequential effects.

The geopolitical reality is that of a world in flux. Different tables are being set and conversations are being held among groups who constitute and reconstitute themselves into varying alliances and networks. Different actors are playing new roles on the geopolitical main stage and south-south cooperation and more recently, south-south and triangular cooperation are rapidly becoming the vital "new normal" of the development agenda. Conversations are also giving birth to new fora. The G20 with inclusion of the world's emerging economies is replacing the G8 bringing much more than only

the interests and views of the very rich to the table. A multi-polar world is fast replacing the former unipolar world.

It is precisely in response to an understanding of this unfolding reality that some four years ago my region of the OECS started a twofold process: one was a careful recalibration of our approach to engaging with the rest of the world and in the process rethinking our strategic interests and developing new relations with non-traditional partners willing and able to champion our cause around tables with limited seats, in various networks. The other was to deepen our own governance and integration arrangements through the execution of a new Treaty in 2011, through which we established a regional parliament, commission and an economic union adding to the other elements of the regional institutional architecture of this grouping which share between them a single secretariat, currency and central bank, supreme court, single authorities for telecommunications and civil aviation, joint diplomatic and technical missions, joint procurement and a regional security system with our neighbor, Barbados. This is the homegrown model that we have designed and refined over the last three decades in a bid to decrease our vulnerabilities and increase our resilience as microstates, as one group.

My esteemed colleagues and friends, I say this to demonstrate that times of fluidity and change can also mean opportunities. But seizing these requires doing away with stale debates and dogma which were right for a different time and place. Bold ideas, innovative thinking and new vision are required today. The tiny countries that I represent, among whom are to be found some of the most vulnerable and highly indebted countries in the world - have nonetheless responded in unique and diverse ways within the context of our capabilities and the resources at our disposal to the changes within this new landscape. All countries and regions of the world are responding to global imperatives and change in a variety of ways; in some a race to arrange themselves in large new trading blocs has been one such discernible response.

Those of us sitting in this forum cannot be immune to what today's realities mean for the future of our membership as a group. We should consider this critical point in time as a moment replete with lessons, for in it we find pointers for the future direction of the ACP as together we embark on a

journey in the realization of a new architecture for this forum, one which has the possibility to result in the carving of an institution which is alert, dynamic, forward thinking; elegant and lean in its structure but nimble in its operations; a political force to be reckoned with across all fora and not just in Europe; an institution for all times ready to face the future with every confidence, unwavering in its commitment to the principles of solidarity which are at its very heart and soul.

In my region, we are firm in our conviction that in unity there is strength, that turbulent times require greater efforts at solidarity not less, and that solidarity provides a platform for all countries large and small, rich and poor to engage each other in a spirit of dignity and respect. It is to the possibilities of this journey that we in the ECS Mission commit ourselves.

Allow me in closing to extend a hand of special friendship - in this the international year of SIDS - to the SIDS of the Pacific with who in other fora such as AOSIS, we in the OECS have developed ties that bind. Closer to home to my friends in the community of the Caribbean Sea which joins us one to the other - it is a real pleasure to join you here in this forum. I look forward to our joint efforts towards the common good. And to our brothers and sister member states of the Continent - ours has been a single root and shared history and it will always continue to be so.

I am honored to commit solidly to this forum and the journey ahead.

Thank you for the graciousness of your welcome.

Brussels, 27 March, 2014.