

Statement by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sir Louis Hilton Straker.

Esteemed Colleagues, Friends of the ACP, I bring warm greetings on behalf of the Caribbean Heads of State and Government, on whose behalf I speak here this morning. The Caribbean Community attaches great importance to this 8th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States. Indeed, the ACP holds special significance for the Caribbean; we can go further and claim paternity of the Group as it was formally established through the Georgetown Agreement signed in Georgetown, Guyana in 1975 some forty one years ago.

As we pause to contemplate where we are, how far we have come and where we go to from here, we must remind ourselves of the original objectives of the Group. When the Georgetown Agreement was signed we had in our minds poverty eradication, promotion of sustainable development, intra-ACP solidarity and cooperation and giving a collective voice to ACP Member States on global issues and in particular in the relationship with the then European Economic Community (EEC).

Today as we meet to consider our future as a Group we need to pause to consider which global, regional and other events occurring since our establishment shape the reality within which we seek to chart a new course for ourselves. Forty-one years is a long time. The Cold War has ended. Developments in Information and Communications Technologies have figuratively made the world a smaller place. Transportation links have been expanded and become more efficient. Financial markets have become globalised. The WTO now regulates international trade and new challenges, including climate change, migration, food, energy and citizen security and terrorism have emerged.

To what extent have these changes affected our original objectives? How do we adjust? It is the answer to these fundamental questions which must determine the outcome of our discussions at this Summit.

THE theme for this 8th Summit is " Repositioning the ACP Group to Respond to the Challenges of Sustainable Development." We have identified the following sub-themes as being of significance:

- (i) Equitable and Sustainable Development for ACP People;
- (ii) Enhancing the role of the ACP Group in Global Governance for Development;
- (iii) Peace, Security and Stability as Essential for Sustainable Development.

I invite this Summit to pause and to compare the theme and sub-themes to the original objectives in the *Georgetown Agreement*. Interestingly, they do not differ significantly though new challenges and realities are now taken on board. These include the Post 2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, The UNFCCC Paris Agreement on Climate Change (COP 21), the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Samoa Pathway. While we in the Caribbean are immeasurably proud of the fact that all of us, with the exception of Haiti, have now graduated into the ranks of middle income countries - this comes with its own special challenges especially when our structural vulnerabilities as small island developing states are taken into account.

We must also take into account new economic realities which include the shift from primary commodity production and sales as a sustainable economic approach, global trade liberalisation under the auspices of the WTO , emerging financial superpowers including the BRICS, the increasing number of middle income developing countries and the increasing physical and economic vulnerability of Small Islands and Low Lying Coastal Developing States. These are underpinned by new global and regional security threats and arrangements. A fundamental shift in global, regional and national planning has taken place in recognition of the fact that social and economic development cannot take place in an environment in which citizen security is not assured.

If we are to plan effectively for the future, we must challenge ourselves by asking some fundamental and rather pointed questions:

- (i) Does the political will exist among us to continue in this family post 2020?
- (ii) Do we have a commitment to learn from our past and make the ACP an organisation which can truly and effectively contribute to the economic and social development of our people?
- (iii) Are we prepared to take more concerted and sustained action to support each other within the framework of the ACP group and contribute more significantly to our own economic development through south south cooperation?

(iv) Are we prepared to stride onto the world stage and explore new development cooperation opportunities while deepening and solidifying those which we already have?

(iv) Are we prepared to focus on the delivery of results, of substance - rather than nice sounding resolutions, mandates and declarations and the pomp that surrounds them?

And finally, Where do we go from here? In my view, we first need to rededicate ourselves to our original, but adjusted, objectives. We have to pledge that we will exercise the political will to make changes which are necessary and implement actions that are required. We must pledge to move beyond the rhetoric to results based actions. We must agree to take into account each other's peculiarities, vulnerabilities and special needs and to move forward in solidarity in support of the interests of all - so that each of us can feel that there is something in a future ACP for us and no region feels undermined or marginalized.

The hosting of this Summit 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. Along the way, an important part of the institutional architecture which will evolve must be one which allows us to respond to the changing nature of our relationships not just with Europe, but also with other partners - in so doing we shape the form of the organization best suited to its future functions.

We, in the Caribbean pledge our support to the process of redefinition of the ACP both as an institution and as a community which can bring benefits to our people and all of the people of the ACP family. We look forward to a meaningful and successful Summit which can chart the way forward as we seek to embrace a future based on the principles of solidarity so long at the very heart of our relationship.