

**Caribbean Research & Policy Center (CRPC)**  
**Forum on**  
**The Future of Caribbean Regional Integration**  
**Keynote Speech by**

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**Introduction**

This is indeed a significant occasion for the People's National Party, as our Delegation embarks on a tour of the Jamaican Diaspora in the United States in celebration of our 60<sup>th</sup> Year of Independence.

As President of the People's National Party and Leader of the Opposition, it is a special honour and privilege to be addressing a Caribbean Diaspora audience in the Washington-Maryland-Virginia (DMV) area.

I commend the Caribbean Research and Policy Center "CRPC" for hosting this forum, which promises to facilitate insightful discussions on the future of regional integration in the Caribbean.

**The Impetus for Regional Integration**

In the Caribbean, our collective history of colonization and conquest, our individual histories of decolonization, and the development of a dynamic, vibrant Caribbean existence, constitute the foundation of our shared regional identity and provide the psychological impetus for regional integration.

In the words of former Prime Minister and President of the People's National Party, the Most Hon. PJ Patterson, "*We are a chain of islands and sub-continental landscapes woven into a quilt of shared geographic space, and endowed with a unique texture of a unique Caribbean blend fomented by our achievements and aspirations...*"

The logic of integration also operates on the practical level. Our grouping of small islands individually lacks the economies of scale and market size to encourage the levels of investment that can expand output, generate greater employment and afford a

better quality of life for our peoples. Acting collectively, we can significantly reduce these deficits, creating the conditions to build our capacity to compete effectively in world trade in goods and services.

And in terms of seeking support on the international stage for solutions to meet our many historical, structural and geographical challenges, while our individual voices are easily ignored, collectively we can punch above our weight and exert a level of influence that gives us a better chance of achieving a more level playing field in our quest for sustainable development.

The new millennium has brought with it a new world of fast-changing geo-political conditions and radically different economic priorities, and the danger of small states like ours being further marginalized looms large. This has been compounded by the global Covid-19 pandemic, and its wake of high inflation and increasing food insecurity that are beginning to create new crises of survival for our people.

All this is happening against a backdrop of the existential threat of accelerating climate change and our particular vulnerabilities to natural disasters, which has been clearly and devastatingly illustrated in recent times.

These trends portend even greater challenges to come, making regional economic integration an inevitable direction. In this context, the stakes of regional inertia are rising rapidly. The demands and challenges of today's world make a compelling case for rationalising and harmonising our economic systems and social institutions, and deepening our regional cooperation whenever, wherever and however it makes sense to do so.

Nothing short of mature regionalism, embedded in proper, effective institutional arrangements and a functioning and beneficial economic convergence, will avoid this.

### **Brief Historical Context**

There can be no meaningful discussion on the future of Caribbean regional integration without an acknowledgement of the journey which has brought us here.

Our journey towards regional integration began with the establishment of the West Indies Federation in Trinidad and Tobago in 1958, then to Dickenson Bay in Antigua where the CARIFTA Agreement was signed in 1965, to Chaguaramas in Trinidad in

1973 where CARICOM was born, and on to Grand Anse in Grenada in 1989 where CARICOM heads of government agreed to establish the Single Market and Economy.

Indeed, CARICOM is one of the longest surviving integration movements throughout the developing world. Our region started its integration process around the same time that the European Union (EU) came into force.

The EU has moved from a Free Trade Agreement, to a Common Market, to a Single Economy and very close to a Political Union. The EU has demonstrated the power and strength of collective organization and, despite various challenges, has shown to the world the strengths and benefits that flow from a commitment to unity and collective solutions.

I would argue that we in the Caribbean have more going for us as reasons to integrate in comparison with the EU, with their more diverse cultures, greater diversity of languages and, wider disparity in economic indicators, yet the EU has advanced their integration process way beyond ours.

In contrast, the promise of Caribbean regional integration remains only that. While we have established several functional regional agencies, we still have a long way to go to achieve regional integration as envisioned by the founders of the integration movement and the subsequent leaders who have promoted this grand idea.

The Caribbean region therefore remains structurally and economically challenged. CARICOM has not been made to operate at its full potential, largely because the Caribbean Single Market & Economy (CSME) has not been implemented.

We are yet to realize the potential of optimal regional integration. The institutional underpinnings of regional integration have been too often subordinated to the varying perceptions of self-interest of individual nations.

Consequently, these institutional underpinnings have not kept pace with our people's own myriad practical forms of collaboration and assimilation through intra-regional migration for trade and employment at the micro level, and a growing trend intra-regional corporate investment and cross-ownership at the firm level.

## **Present Context**

It is fair to say that we have come to accept at the political level that we have to support the practical integration efforts of our people with bolder actions by our respective Governments, and by more effective implementation by our institutions. We acknowledge that Caribbean integration is inextricably linked to Caribbean development.

Unfortunately, we have recently been experiencing a Caribbean which, sporadically but too frequently, manifests a lack of unity.

There are various reasons for these episodes of disunity – some from within the region, borne of an unfortunate tendency to embrace an opportunistic and myopic form of individualistic politics; others from pressures or allurements from outside. These episodes are sometimes deliberate and sometimes inadvertent. Whenever these indiscretions occur, we appear to lose sight of our goal. The results are the same – lack of progress towards the benefits of deeper integration.

As leaders, we are the architects and drivers of regional integration. We have an obligation to lead. The perceived inertia of CARICOM is an indictment on us all. As it is, citizens of CARICOM do not sufficiently feel the benefits of integration through their daily activities. We need to be determined and consistent in our efforts to actualize the practical benefits of regional integration for our people. These include:

- Unrestricted travel of CARICOM citizens among all CARICOM member states;
- Free movement of labour for employment;
- Convenient and affordable movement of people and cargo throughout the region;
- Implementation of and accession to the CSME by all member states;
- Accession of all member states to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) as our final court of appeal, giving our people greater access to justice than the Privy Council, a vestigial colonial court that sits in London.

We have to ask ourselves the hard questions and be prepared to act on the agreed answers. Are our goods allowed to move freely within the region, without bureaucratic national hindrances? Accepting the economic and social benefits of a single regional

labour market, what must be done to facilitate this on the ground? Do we really have a Common External Tariff that is working consistently and effectively for the business community in the region? Why are we not further down the road in harmonizing the laws and rules governing trade, corporate establishment and investment across our region?

These questions indicate that we have identified the tasks that face us. We now need to address these issues with resolute determination, thereby building the Caribbean Community that our predecessors envisioned. We must create the conditions in which the practical benefits of closer regional economic and social collaboration propel the region into a future of sustainable development.

The maturing of our integration process through greater focus on people-centred economic approaches, and the strengthening and re-orientation of regional institutions, are vital for mitigating our prevailing conditions of vulnerability.

However, the lingering spectre of the 1961 referendum in Jamaica, which led to the demise of the West Indies Federation, provides a continuing reminder of the need to be a greater understanding of why unity among ourselves is necessary and beneficial.

Accordingly, our efforts must be buttressed by engaging our Caribbean citizens, both across the region and the Caribbean Diaspora, in an open and honest discussion about our Caribbean Community. We must find participatory ways to involve all our people, their ideas, their talents and creativity, as we seek to advance our progress as a region.

Again, when I speak of involving all our people, I am referring also to effectively harnessing the expertise, talent, and resources of our Diaspora.

### **Expanding our Cultural and Creative Industries**

Our tourism products if marketed as a regional product, has new and exciting possibilities, as visitors to our region go from village to village, province to province, and country to country within the region. We can leverage the comparative advantage of our rich and diverse cultural and creative industries, to bring enhanced benefits to the region.

For example, our region's cuisine, from daal and roti in the South to jerk chicken and rice and peas in the North, and our popular music, from calypso and soca through to reggae and dancehall, command worldwide attraction. Showcasing Caribbean life,

culture and entertainment capacity as part of a regional product provides us with the opportunity to take our tourism industries to the next level.

### **Food Security**

With the emerging threat of global inflation and food insecurity in the wake of the global pandemic, it is vital for us in the Caribbean region to revive develop our agricultural sector, which has been in decline since the demise of the post-colonial protective pricing and quota regimes for our traditional commodities of sugar and bananas.

Regional solutions are being explored, and are within our collective reach. We have the natural resources and know-how in our region to ensure that our people are protected these threats and challenges. There is an urgency to resolve these issues, as what may be merely the early stage of this crisis is already upon us. The problems affect all of us in the region, presenting the opportunity and logic for a regional approach to solving them.

We endorse the move by CARICOM to invest in Vision 2025, which aims to decrease our regional food import bill by 25% by 2025. It is noteworthy that the recently-formed associate institution of CARICOM, the Caribbean Private Sector Organization (CPSO), has played a catalytic role in formulating this target. I salute the regional leaders who have stepped up to take this initiative forward.

In this new world of profound shocks, we need to forge new and resilient relationships. The bold Vision 25 initiative seeks to boost agricultural production and strengthen food security in the region through the injection of financial capital in the sector, removing trade barriers, and the establishment of a reliable system of intra-regional transportation.

The vast and fertile lands of Belize, Guyana and Suriname are on our doorstep. Potential synergies exist, as the region could benefit greatly from Jamaican management, technical expertise and potential to mobilize finance capital.

Similarly, in this new world of energy insecurity, the natural gas of Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname could be essential to a reduced carbon footprint, even as we seek to transition to a fossil fuel-free future. This can be achieved through regional integration and cooperation.

None of this will be easy to accomplish. Indeed, Vision 25 is a very ambitious target, never attempted before. Essential to achieving it will be extensive research, policy formulation and logistical planning.

Happily, the capacity for these key inputs already exists in the region as, among our people at home and in the Diaspora, there are the academic researchers and other qualified and experienced experts who are willing to help to make this new Caribbean regional dream come true. We must identify and then leverage the synergies regional cooperation, collaboration, and collective action.

### **Jamaica's role in Regional Integration**

In the past, Jamaica played a major and often decisive role at the centre of Caribbean deliberations and decision-making, and has been a leading force for cooperation within our region. From the original formulation in the 1950s of the West Indies Federation, in which the founding President of our Party and National Hero of Jamaica, the Rt. Excellent Norman Washington Manley played a catalytic role, Jamaica has been a leader of the integration movement.

We believe that the optimal pathway for achieving greater regional energy security, food security, stronger health care systems and the mobilization of finance to build climate resilience and mitigate the impact of climate change, is through our collective regional efforts in the Caribbean.

From our perspective, one of the biggest failures of the current administration in Jamaica is the extent to which well-established principles, which have long served the interests of Jamaica well in our international relations, have been subordinated to opportunistic, divisive pandering to external interests. These instances of willingness to depart from the principle of collective action in international affairs have created tensions within our region, at a time when greater cooperation and effective collective action are needed.

As we face an increasingly challenging global environment, the need for our government to protect the interests of Jamaicans at home by building meaningful relationships abroad, could not be more apparent. Unfortunately, in recent years Jamaica has too often been missing in action from the heart of regional deliberations on the pressing issues of our time. Jamaica has been noticeably absent from the centre of the recent Caribbean initiatives towards stronger integration.

We see this as a missed opportunity. Our absence can only weaken the effectiveness of CARICOM, given our historic position of leadership in the region.

Our Caribbean friends have redefined themselves as frontline states in the battle against climate change, and have made an impact through powerful advocacy for new international financing modalities for investments in climate adaptation and mitigation. Jamaica's voice in this global conversation has been muted.

As regional politics shifts towards more assertive action, it is time for Jamaica to return to the centre of this change. CARICOM needs institutional transformation to become more agile and responsive, and Jamaica should be a positive force for change.

We are heartened by the decision taken at the recent Heads of Government meeting to adopt the CARICOM Commission on the Economy's recommendation to allow action on a trade and integration matters if as few as five of the fifteen member states wish to move ahead, as long as the others are not disadvantaged. Other recommendations of this report are also being adopted, with respect to the free movement of people and goods, regional anti-money laundering certificates, and regional investment funds.

Jamaica should grasp the opportunity to support and give impetus to the new reforms and ideas. We must seize this opportunity and help to lead CARICOM to becoming a more vibrant, vital community. Friendship and relationships require presence, and Jamaica has been absent for too long.

### **Role of the Diaspora in Regional Integration**

The Caribbean Diaspora is an important force for regional unity. CARICOM, as a maturing regional integration entity needs a mechanism to harness the support of our Caribbean people in the Diaspora. We have to facilitate their considerable goodwill and capacity in support of Caribbean development. We also need to provide our Diaspora with channels of reliable information about what is happening in the region.

For example, CARICOM is yet to devise a formal methodology for tapping the overseas capital markets through making attractively packaged investment financing instruments available to the Caribbean Diaspora. Such capital flows could be directed towards



critical development needs in the region, including the modernizing and expanding of regional air and sea transport. The multiplier effect that such a development would provide to regional trade and economic development would be significant.

### **Jamaica's Foreign Policy Overview**

Jamaica under successive PNP governments has built a respected global reputation that has been used to advance the region's interests in international organizations and institutions. Since our political independence 60 years ago, Jamaica has gained respect, regionally and internationally, because of the bold statesmanship by consequential leaders like Michael Manley, PJ Patterson and Portia Simpson Miller.

Indeed, under the PNP Jamaica has stood for consistent adherence to progressive democratic principles in furtherance of the strategic interests of the developing world. We deal with other nations on the basis of sovereign equality and diplomatic common sense. Jamaica has thus been able to successfully mediate our encounters with the other nations of the world, and will continue to do so under a future PNP Government.

We have never reaped substantial benefits from genuflection to international superpowers. To the contrary, we have made solid gains when Jamaica has strengthened to pursuit of a common cause by providing leadership at the political, diplomatic and technical levels within CARICOM, the OAS, the UN, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Commonwealth. That approach will once again commend itself when Jamaica is under my leadership.

At the same time, we recognize the importance and immense value of Jamaica's longstanding partnership with Washington, which is based on mutual respect and consistent adherence to the principles which have beneficially guided our friendly relations.

Happily, there are far more instances where our interests coincide than there is divergence. We will continue to work collaboratively in furthering our common interests, based on our shared democratic ideals and our deep linkages.

### **The Way Forward**

States within CARICOM that wish to accelerate the process of regional integration process should proceed to do so, confident that the other countries will come along when they see the benefits being manifested. Those who lead this movement will, by

force of example, bring others along on the road to progress, and Jamaica must be up front and centre.

I reiterate that significant political will is needed to make this happen. It calls for putting our heads together at the political level to look at ways in which we can address our challenges and opportunities.

We can attain food security if we wish, using the vast agricultural lands in Guyana, Suriname and Belize; the technology and efficient energy resources from Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana; the logistics, planning and financial engineering from Barbados and Jamaica; labour from the OECS and Haiti; and so on.

We have an abundance of resources in the Caribbean. We have gold, oil, gas, water, arable land space, bauxite, forestry, world-class tourism products and attractive offerings in health, culture and sports. We must work collectively to find ways to monetize our assets for the benefit of the people of the region. We can effectively diversify our economies, create the enabling environment for our economies to strive, not just survive.

We cannot stand still. We must take action to achieve the benefits of regional integration. We must move forward with confidence, commitment and abundant energy.

Standing united and acting together, we in the Caribbean can fulfil the promise of a brighter future for all our peoples.