

**Lucian Isidore,  
Director of Community Services & Local Government ( Saint. Lucia)  
Remarks on behalf of CARICOM**

**AT The**

**Caribbean Development Bank / Inter American Development Bank  
Civil Society Organizations Dialogue: CSO Responsibilities and  
Actions in National Decision Making Development Planning and  
Implementation**

*January 24-25, 2006*

( Port of Spain -Trinidad)

The community has over the years forged important multifaceted cooperation arrangements with key partners; It has established the Cariforum mechanism for cooperation with their regional partners in the wide-ranging arrangements with the European Union under the ACP/EU agreements. This network of external linkages, together with our close consultations and joint positions on important international matters has enabled us to effectively protect and promote the region's interests at the hemispheric and international levels.

**GLOBALIZATION AND THE CARICOM RESPONSE**

The Caribbean community in its Mission Statement commits itself "To provide dynamic leadership and service with community institutions and groups toward the attainment of a viable, internationally competitive and sustainable community, with improved quality of life for all."

These goals articulated in the Mission Statement are being challenged by the fast moving currents of globalization, as the Caribbean community seeks to assert its place in a newly emerging order, social and economic order. These developments should inspire us to redouble our efforts as a community, not drive us to panic. Indeed, the linkages and close cooperation with our partners in the international community have laid a foundation that should make this task easier. A world of greater openness brings with it a wealth of

opportunities together with its many challenges. It demands of us a new dynamism and strategic thinking. Working hand in hand with Caribbean civil society, we are certainly more than equal to the task.

As we speak, new initiatives are taking root in every field of global endeavor. The increasing responsiveness of the global community to humanitarian crises and the evolving role of the World Trade Organization are examples of this trend. Beyond these developments, we find increasing connections of peoples across the national borders driven by the revolution in information technology, shared cultural experiences and migration and refugee flows. In this global environment the mission of our integration movement is even more vital as a means by which the interests and the aspirations of the peoples of the Caribbean can be advanced.

## **CIVIL SOCIETY**

From the earliest stages, CARICOM has recognized the central role of the people of the region in forging its vision and shaping its agenda. The adoption of the Charter of Civil Society by the Heads of Government in their 8<sup>th</sup> Intercessional in February 1997 solidified CARICOM's commitment to a binding partnership with civil society. Indeed, one of the most far-reaching consultations that I can recall was the West Indian Commission process which consulted Caribbean peoples within the community and across the Diaspora and produced a landmark document for our peoples - a time for action. It was out of this process that many critical initiatives emerged, including the establishment of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), which gave life to the dream of deepening and widening our regional integration movement.

We are called upon to explore the role of civil society in designing and implementing strategies to help us to pursue successfully the goal of Caribbean development in the global system. We must consider our future efforts to deal with such challenges as the regional impact of the AIDS pandemic, the fight against illicit drug trafficking, the protection of the environment and the recognition of the special status of the Caribbean Sea in the Context of sustainable development. This is a region-wide process, as all

the countries are advancing, albeit at different speeds, towards the “greying” of their societies. Two features of this process are of urgent concern. First, the rate at which population aging is taking place and will continue to take place in the future is faster than the rates recorded in the past by today’s developed countries. Second, the environment in which this process is occurring is marked by high levels of poverty, persistent and acute social inequity, institutional underdevelopment, low social security coverage and a probable trend towards decreased family support owing to the decline in fertility.

As we deliberate over the next two days at this forum, the precipitating issues appear daunting. Let me ask you to consider this proposition: the intimidating social challenges should become the clarion call that rouses us from slumber. Some of these and all their manifestations are not the problem; but the consequences of the problem. And in some redemptive way let us profit the opportunity and use the discussions, exploratory and prescriptive as the catalyst for renewal; to allow to emerge a new political morality that will transcend previous categories and forge new relationships and connections between people and issues. Out of these will emerge new configurations; will come the creative political initiatives we so desperately need.

Let it generate a new moral and political will to change our lives and our communities. Both private and public support will be needed for the kind of community-based initiatives that empower individuals and families to change their own circumstances and their neighbor’s well being.

A starting point is to subject all projects and initiatives, decisions and policies to new criteria; whether they make justice more possible for all of us and especially for those on the bottom; whether they allow us to live in more harmony with the earth; and whether they increase the participation of all people in decision making. In other words, we must learn to judge our social and economic choices by whether they empower the powerless, protect the earth, and foster true democracy.

I am certain that in addition to these examples, participants in today's dialogue will identify and discuss many other areas in which CARICOM has

made a difference and a reason on which we must focus our attention for the future. I have no doubt that many will also identify areas in which we, as a region, have not done enough - but such is the nature of the dialogue that we must have.

## **THE VISION**

Caricom remains steadfast in its commitment to the tenets of democracy and good governance in our societies and in this regard pays special tribute to its development partners, the Non- Governmental organizations and the Civil Society Organizations who continue to serve the community's vision.

In the tone of the Foreign Minister of Jamaica addressing a similar forum June 19, 2001

“The vision for the Caribbean development must be driven by constant input from the people of the region. The process of consultation today must become and even more integral part of our CARICOM life. We must ensure that every CARICOM citizen - from the forests of Guyana in the South to the beaches of the Bahamas in the North - understands and feels himself/herself a member of a team a part of the work of CARICOM. We must make the evolution of a true sense of community and a strong Caribbean identity our most urgent task, as we, who share this common Caribbean history "forward together" to our common destiny - a truly integrated Caribbean community, securing progress and development for all our peoples.”

---