



My September visit to four eastern Caribbean nations—St. Lucia, Dominica, Barbados, and Grenada—has generated exceptional goodwill overall and, in particular, demonstrated our concerns for Canada’s Caribbean neighbors in their time of need and demonstrated Canada’s willingness to assist in providing humanitarian assistance.

Overview

The Canadian High Commissioner in Barbados, Michael Welsh, who is also responsible for Canada’s diplomatic relations with several other eastern Caribbean nations, accompanied me on my visit to Grenada, devastated by Hurricane Ivan. The High Commissioner also facilitated a number of meetings in Barbados with concerned officials, including the British High Commissioner in Grenada, Victor Wallis, as well as arranging for a luncheon with Caribbean business leaders. My office did an exemplary job of organizing my visit to Grenada and Barbados with the High Commissioner, as well as organizing my visit to St. Lucia and Dominica with their respective governments. The fol-



A giant automobile transfer ship from Japan in harbour of Dominica delivering used failed emission standard cars and trucks.

lowing is a short report on each of the four Eastern Caribbean countries visited.

Barbados

Barbados is one of the most established and economically diverse islands in the region. Barbados has a significant financial sector and an international shipping industry, in which Canada Steamship Lines is one of the many international participants flying the Barbadian flag. Barbados is also a well known tourist destination for North Americans. While many Canadians line Barbadian beaches, Canadian products were not as abundant on Barbadian store shelves, which suggests great potential for Canadian economic and trade interests. In Barbados, High Commissioner Michael Welsh facilitated a number of meetings and held a luncheon with significant business and government officials to discuss the economic relationship between Canada and the Caribbean. Persons in attendance included senior representatives of the Royal Bank and Stantec Consulting, one of Canada’s largest engineering firms, headquartered in Edmonton, employing 4,000 persons worldwide. Also in-



cluded were representatives of Trilon International (international banking and finance, based in Toronto), Sypher Mueller International Inc. (airport designing, based in Ottawa), Digital Rez and Gildan Activewear (based in Montreal). Political interest in the Caribbean economy by Canada's Official Opposition Party was most welcomed by the meeting's participants.

Grenada

Flying over Grenada, one can tell that the devastation is extensive, with over 90% of the buildings destroyed or damaged and with the foliage on the island stripped bare. The first security forces to assist in maintaining order and providing humanitarian assistance to Grenada arrived from Trinidad and Tobago, and from Venezuela. While Venezuela is in the midst of an ongoing territorial dispute with Grenada over an island in the deep sea oil and gas field, Venezuela is also regarded as being close to Cuba in terms of its international political outlook.

Grenada's largest export crop of nutmeg is wiped out, as trees have been stripped or knocked over. Estimates of a ten year recovery period spell disaster for the island's agricultural exports. Venezuela has offered to rebuild schools, while in time insurance claims will help rebuild the resorts. Economic opportunities, while quite secondary to present emergency needs, nonetheless are vital to providing much needed future jobs and foreign income. This

year's hurricane season demonstrated the need for a more robust Canadian emergency response capability in the Caribbean and the political capability to see it through. At a minimum, there must be a renewed commitment to increasing our political and economic operational capabilities with the associated states of the Caribbean community (CARICOM) and to thereby ensure the more effective distribution of Canadian aid, disaster response supplies, and funds, in Grenada and elsewhere.



Member of Parliament Peter Goldring meeting with a Member of Parliament and Senator from the island nation of Dominica.

St. Lucia

In St. Lucia, I met with many government officials, including: the Permanent Secretary of Tourism Mary Falwell, Opposition Leader Marcus Nicholas, and the Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs Cosmos Richardson. St. Lucia has some major economic concerns. The export economy is highly dependent on a primary crop: bananas. St. Lucia wishes to move towards diversification of the island's industry and economy to avoid the boom and bust economic cycles associated with poor crop yields and climatic devastations. Both St. Lucia and Dominica will soon face catastrophic shutdowns of banana crop exports as the European Union removes the favoured trade status that the two countries had enjoyed, through their association with Great Britain. At the same time, competition with large Central American plantations will leave St. Lucia and Dominica with little or no remaining market, unless their major crop is



either value added processed to other exportable items or replaced with other marketable export crops. St. Lucia benefits from aid assisted projects by other countries, such as a school being financed by mainland China. The major import in the country is oil, reflecting the fact that 100% of electricity is generated through the use of imported oil. St. Lucian officials expressed great openness to Canadian business and trade interests, to help diversify the St. Lucian economy.

Dominica

In Dominica, I met with Opposition Leader and former Prime Minister, the Hon. Edison James, Minister of Tourism Charles Savarin, Minister of Community Development Matthew Walter and Minister of Foreign Affairs Osbourne Riviere. Dominica has similar economic concerns as St. Lucia, with a greater need for economic diversification, due to an agricultural sector (18% of GDP), which is highly vulnerable to international supply/demand issues and climatic conditions. It is said that no person need ever starve on Dominica, as there is an overabundance of food—so much so that various food items end up rotting on the plants, due to a lack of processing and shipping facilities, as well as a lack of developed export markets. There is a potential here for Dominican-Canadian joint ventures that would benefit both countries.

Dominica has a rocky, black volcanic

sand beached coastline conducive to the “ecotourism” field, for the more adventurous tourist wishing to explore its combination of rocky coastlines and lush tropical forests. At the same time, Dominica has particular economic advantages. Dominica produces half of its electric power requirements by hydro means and also has substantial geothermal power generation potential. On the shopping list of needs are roads, hotels and a new international airport to serve a growing interest in ecotourism. In addition, Dominica is home to a substantial number of members of the Caribbean’s aboriginal community, whose unique culture

should be preserved and protected. While Dominica has many challenges, it also has great opportunities for Canadian interests, particularly in areas of product manufacturing and imports.

Common Economic Issues

A common concern among the Caribbean countries I visited was the sense that Canada was pulling back from the Caribbean, politically and economically. The Eastern Caribbean region of countries alone represents a marketplace of over one million people, while its southern Caribbean Rim influence is 20 million or more. The population influences of the entire Caribbean Rim of nations is over 120 million. The need for more active and conscientious Canadian engagement in the region is



Cruise ship in harbour of St. Lucia. Many island nations are questioning the economic value versus the ecological impact of the cruise ship industry.

paramount. Canadian goals and policy in the region are in need of refinement. Goals should be clearly established in relation to three principal areas: political engagement, economic development, and humanitarian/security assistance. There is much interest in the region for enhanced Canadian involvement to develop a regular, direct, deep water trade route to Canada, for Canadian partnership in value added diversified farm production, food processing, manufacturing and facility construction, as well as for involvement in business and personal telecommunication delivery systems, geothermal energy sources and free trade transshipping ports.

Conclusion

My visit to Barbados, Grenada, St. Lucia, and Dominica, demonstrated that the Caribbean countries welcome Canada to develop stronger working relationships with established regional organizations, such as CARICOM (the Caribbean Community and Common Market) and OECS (the Organization of East Caribbean States). Canada should seek closer associations with the diverse countries, protectorates and representative organizations of the Caribbean for the enhancement of trade, economic development, cultural, humanitarian and security interests for all concerned. If Canada is not prepared to reengage the Caribbean in these areas, others will gladly do so, resulting in significant lost opportunities for Canada.

Update: In late October, Marcus Nicholas, Member of Parliament and leader of the Official Opposition in St. Lucia, informed our office of his desire to visit Canada to speak with our party leader and other government officials. It is hoped that this visit will be encouraged by those who appreciate the political and economic benefits, to Canada and to the Caribbean generally, of this type of interface.

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This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment to fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.

Your Opinion Matters...

Question #1 Should we seek economic development opportunities in the Caribbean for Canadian business and farming industries?

Yes No

Question #2 Do you believe that Canada can do more to encourage the trade of Canadian made goods and farm products in the Caribbean and South America?

Yes No

Comments: _____

Name: _____
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