

**FEATURE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE**  
**HON. CHRISTOPHER SINCKLER, MINISTER OF**  
**FOREIGN AFFAIRS, FOREIGN TRADE AND**  
**INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ON THE OCCASION**  
**OF THE SIGNING OF THE ECONOMIC**  
**PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE**  
**EUROPEAN UNION AND CARIFORUM**  
**OCTOBER 15, 2008**

Master of Ceremonies,  
President of the Council of the European Union  
Vice-President of the European Commission,  
Fellow Ministers,  
Secretary General of CARIFORUM,  
Other specially invited guests,  
Members of the Press,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to join my colleague, Minister of State Hon. Donville Inniss in welcoming you all to Barbados on this very important and auspicious occasion as we the member countries of the CARIFORUM and the European Union

affix our signatures to the Economic Partnership Agreement negotiated between us over the past four years. Barbados is honoured to have been invited by its peers to be the host country for this historic event.

I especially want to extend a warm Caribbean welcome to all our visiting ACP and European colleagues and friends. Though your stay might be short, and your appointed task here even shorter, Barbadians would not at all object if you find time to enjoy the many delights of our beautiful island – that is at least for sure the ones for which some monetary contribution is required.

It would be remiss of me if I were to let this occasion pass without recognizing the leadership role played by two of the stalwarts of the negotiations that led us to this occasion, even as they now take decidedly different paths in their personal and professional lives.

I speak in the first instance of role played by Rt. Hon. Peter Mandelson, former EU Trade Commissioner, whom we

learned, quite unexpectedly has returned to his native land to perform the function of Minister in Her Majesty's Royal Government at Westminster.

His leadership on the EU side and generally in the entire negotiations process was as critical as it was at times controversial. But, in all things never failing to recognize, I am told, the grave importance of concluding an agreement that made sense for both sides.

In common parlance it is now fashionable when bidding a colleague adieu, as they take on some new and challenging task, to invite them to "go break a leg". Unfortunately, knowing just how tough Mr. Mandelson can be, rendering such an investiture might not be the best in these circumstances. However I am sure you would all join with me in wishing him every success in his new role.

Equally, I wish to take this opportunity also to pay tribute to my predecessor in this Ministerial portfolio, Dame Billie Miller, the former Senior Minister and CARIFORUM

Ministerial Coordinator for the EPA negotiations. Her contribution to this entire exercise cannot and should not be forgotten. It was in a few short words – sterling and outstanding. Indeed her wisdom, foresight, forthrightness, and utter dedication to the task entrusted to her by our Heads of Government and her colleague trade ministers played no small role in steering the region and its negotiators through arguably its most challenging set of negotiations to date.

What we sign here today is as much due to Dame Billie's work as it is to anyone else's involved in this process and I feel compelled to pause as I invite you to acknowledge her contribution this morning.

More than nine months ago, right here in Barbados, regional governments along with their EU counterparts laid ensconced in the early hours of the morning, in a cold and presumably uncomfortable room faced with a major decision. It was a decision which, though conditioned and shaped by several external factors, including a now

infamous WTO deadline, all of those present knew would have potentially life altering implications for all the countries of this small region of ours.

After close to four years of intense negotiations, heated arguments, studies on top of studies, impact assessments, text and redrafted text and countless hours of study and meetings – a decision was called upon to be made.

In the end, given all the arguments, CARIFORUM, ably led by the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM), and as mandated by regional Heads of Government initialed the final negotiating text.

By taking such a decision our governments were doing basically two things. First they were pulling the curtain, or so they thought, on the most intense phase of the process leading to production of a new guiding framework for economic relations between the Caribbean and Europe.

Secondly in doing so they were, according to all analyses, ushering in a fundamental break with the past and entry into a new world of economic, political and social existence for the Caribbean region and its people.

The major question then, as it is now, and will always be going forward, is whether our region, whether we as a people could afford the luxury procrastination even in the face of fundamental global change.

Perhaps we don't believe it, even though we say often enough, and surely witness it every day with the naked eye. But it cannot escape us, either as nations or as individuals that this world economy in which we are made to exist has radically changed and will continue to do so whether we like it or not.

For me the scholastic observation of former World Bank Chief Economist and now Noble Laureate in Economics, Joseph Stiglitz, that the fundamental problem facing developing countries in dealing with globalization and

economic liberalization is that “they do not set the policy agenda.....and because of this will always be at a disadvantage in engaging radical change”. This is the critical point of intercession for our region in answering the question – do we engage or not engage.

Knowing our limitations as small and vulnerable states with weak and underdeveloped economic sectors, with limited productive capacity but intrinsically hemmed to a volatile global economy, we understand that we are fundamentally disadvantaged in the process. It is an inescapable truism.

But is also true that those systemic and characteristic features of regional economies will not go away anytime soon and rather could potentially get worse if as small economies we do not intercede at the most critical junctures to at least participate in helping to shape the very instruments that will affect every facet of our lives.

Now, we may not have set the agenda which established the requirements for this type agreement to be negotiated.

Indeed we certainly did not set the excruciating and some would even say unreasonable timelines that governed the work of the negotiators. But at least unlike what has transpired in many different forums in which agendas are set and prescriptions imposed on us without our input, this process afforded us the opportunity to influence in some significant way the destiny of our future relations with Europe and perhaps even the rest of the world.

And it is against that backdrop that regional governments established clear guidelines as to the overall mandate which they gave to the region's negotiators.

The core principles of that mandates were:

1. That in agreeing to liberalize “substantially all trade” that our most sensitive sectors would have to be shielded entirely from exposure to liberalization. It is now indisputable that the final agreement has seen to that.

2. That any liberalization of tariffs/duties would have to reflect the ultimate sensitivities of regional economies to the need for revenue to be raised and so would have to be implemented in a manner least likely to cause major financial dislocation. I believe that the final agreement provides for that.
  
3. That given differences in levels of development between the region and Europe that the level of commitments on both sides would have to reflect a high level of asymmetry consistent with the best practices of unequal treatment for unequal partners. I believe that the agreement provides significantly for this.
  
4. That given the very sacred and surely fragile nature of our own CSME process, that any EPA would seek to enhance rather than destroy the regional integration process. I am yet to be convinced despite commentary to the contrary that anything in this EPA will so impinge on our own process as to render it useless.

Conversely it may even act to accelerate the pace at which we integrate.

5. That regardless of whatever we negotiated with the EU the provisions agreed by us in defense of our CARICOM LDCs as provided for in the ART. 164 of the Revised Treaty must be explicitly recognized and incorporated into the EPA. Surely in this agreement such provision has indeed been made.
6. That where it was clear that CARICOM had not advanced its own integration in respect of disciplines such as government procurement that any EPA would not commit us beyond the level at which we had already reached. In this EPA clearly this too has been achieved.
7. That as consideration for the our efforts at liberalization with Europe and mindful of the cost associated with the liberalization itself that an appropriate infusion of development priorities and

actions would characterize the agreement not only in one section but through the entire agreement. A careful read of the EPA will show that this too has been achieved in keeping with and at times surpassing the best practices of development infused trade relations.

8. That the cost of liberalization, adjustment, and the implantation of the agreement itself had to be supported in large measure by the provision of financial assistance sufficient to allow our region to make the transition from basic commodity preferential dependence, to fully capacitated open trading partner. Clearly we have made a significant start in this regard but surely our EU colleagues would agree that we are not quite there yet. I will speak more specially to this point in a moment.

But from a fundamental platform of eight core objectives within the general mandate given to our negotiators as the benchmarks against which success or failure in these

negotiations would be measured, it would not be a stretch of the truth for me, or anyone else to conclude that we have not done our best in the circumstances.

We knew it was going to be tough; we knew that serious sacrifices and compromises would have to be made, and likewise we knew that it would, in the end, usher in a completely new era of economic and trade relations with Europe in which this region would finally have to face the realities of a changed, changing and ultimately more unfriendly global economy.

Our signature of this agreement today in my view represents a fundamental signal to the rest of the world that Caribbean countries are maturely and decidedly breaking with a long loved past that in fact has now passed.

Of course there are those among us who prefer like Lot's wife to look back at a life which we must have enjoyed and longed for to continue. We can have no quarrels with that. But surely they understand that we must move on. Clearly

they are those who, like Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist, will always say we have not got enough keep on negotiating until you get all you want. But surely they too understand that this is impractical and realities of the agenda set for us do not allow us that luxury so we must move on.

And then they are those like the inimitable character in V. S Naipaul's classic Miguel Street who sawed and hammered and nailed day in and day out hoping to produce the perfect piece of furniture only for it to be discovered by his neighbours that such a piece will never be delivered. Surely they too must understand that no negotiated agreement is perfect and can produce perfect results.

What we can do however is to set realistic objectives and target our energies to achieving substantially the essence, spirit and letter of those goals. That as a region we have been able to do, so this in large measure is something to be satisfied with and not degraded.

So with this act today we embrace an uncertain future. And now our attention and energies must be focused not on what could have been but what has to be moving forward.

This is a highly complex and comprehensive agreement and the effort needed to implement it will be at times more onerous than that spent negotiating it.

Our task now is to set in motion a CARIFORUM wide process at both regional and national levels to create effective mechanisms and structures to allow each and every country in this region to take advantage of the opportunities which this EPA presents.

In Barbados, the Cabinet has agreed to the establishment of an EPA Coordination and Implementation Unit charged with the responsibility of studying the entire agreement and devising strategies and programmes to enhance the capacity of our ministries to implement and the private sector to engage and exploit this agreement.

I am confident several of our regional colleagues are doing likewise.

Equally, at the regional level, I am advised that the CARIFORUM Secretariat has already devised a comprehensive, though only preliminary, road map for implementation of the EPA for regional governments.

I expect that at the earliest opportunity CARIFORUM Ministers of Trade will sit down to refine and agree on that road map and the mechanisms needed to successfully implement it. The time is short and the stakes way too high for procrastination or prevarication.

Finally, a short word to our colleagues from the EU. As the first region to have negotiated and signed a comprehensive EPA, CARIFORUM has demonstrated a level of seriousness of purpose that many thought was beyond us. We understand fully the positive and yes the negative implications likely to arise from the implementation of this agreement. But we equally know and understand the levels

of commitments which Europe has made in an effort to assist this region in implementing this agreement must now come to fruition.

In this regard, I wish to remind our EU partners of their commitment to providing development support to buttress regional integration, facilitate the implementation of EPA commitments, and improve supply capacity and competitiveness in accordance with priorities identified by CARIFORUM across the broad spectrum of negotiating subjects. The EPA text (Article 7.4), underlines the obligation of both CARIFORUM and the European Commission to take all measures necessary to ensure the effective mobilization, disbursement and utilization of the resources which facilitate development cooperation.

*Although mindful that the development dimension of the EPA is not limited to the direct transfer of resources, I must emphasise that the timely delivery of necessary financial support will be vital if the EPA is to achieve the*

*objectives which both sides set out in their negotiating mandates.*

We equally expect the Commission and EU Member States to become more proactive in helping the region to put in place the necessary institutions and processes to enable our exporters to become more competitive in the delivery of both goods and services.

*Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen - We see the EPA as a package, incorporating Development Cooperation, Trade in Goods, Trade in Services, and Trade Related Issues. In our view, the effective execution of the first of these elements is a prerequisite for the success of the other three.*

The EU Aid for Trade (AfT) facility represents an important source of additional funding for the implementation of the CARIFORUM EPA. The EU AfT commitment envisages increasing trade-related development support to €2 billion per year by 2010 with

half of these AfT resources being earmarked for EPA implementation in ACP regions. The CARIFORUM EPA text includes a declaration that the region will benefit from an equitable share of the one (1) billion Euro, which represents the commitments of EU Member States (not including the Commission) for EPA implementation.

But I hasten to add that to date the modalities governing access to the AID FOR TRADE resources of EU Member States have not yet been properly elaborated although these were to have been in place since the end of last year and, secondly, questions have been raised about the actual amount of net additional AID FOR TRADE resources, which will be available. I am optimistic these concerns will be immediately addressed.

Failure to satisfactorily do so or to meet those commitments to their fullest extent will not only compromise the implementation of this agreement but permanently damage our futuristic relations.

In concluding, allow me to express our appreciation to the valuable and valued work of our negotiators and all others involved in this process from its beginnings and at various points along the way.

As I reflected in the beginning of this presentation, today signals the start of a new era in our relations with the EU and even with the rest of the world. So as we proceed to affix our signatures, let us in this region together reflect on the poignant words of Baroness Young who in a lecture to the UWI in 1996 was moved comment:

**“ It follows that whatever happens after the year 2000 will have to be negotiated against a background of a changed world in which many EU member states question every aspect of the EU development policy, let alone ask why there should be a special relationship with a limited groups of nations. The message is clear: the scenario will be bleak for any ACP nation unable to adapt to this new reality. The issues are no longer about**

**morality. This conclusion is now almost certainly the defining truth about future ACP/EU relationships”.**

Ladies and gentlemen welcome to the future.

I thank you