



THE BAHAMAS

INFORMAL MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

BRIEFING ON THE SITUATION IN HAITI

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Mister President, it is a special honour to be here this morning for this important briefing to this august world body. I speak here this morning on behalf of the Chair of the Caribbean Community, PM PJ Patterson as well as on behalf of the Government of The Bahamas. There is no doubt in the view of all leaders of Caricom and of my own Prime Minister Perry Christie, the Government and people of The Bahamas that Haiti is front and centre a most urgent issue for our region and hemisphere. Further, Caricom believes that this body has a crucial role to play in developing and executing a solution to this urgent crisis in Haiti. I wish to thank you Mr. President for convening this meeting. I wish to thank the Distinguished Undersecretary-General for his comprehensive report.

In this regard, I wish to speak this morning of Haiti and the current urgent issues that arise there, not just as a legal obligation of the world community in accordance with the charter but in the view of Caricom and The Bahamas and most importantly as a moral imperative. Both law and morality dictate that the world community should help, each country to the fullest extent of its resources. I can say without contradiction that this is the unanimous view of all the nations of this hemisphere and of our region.

I am also here to say that Caricom, the regional body in the Caribbean representing 15 nations, of which Haiti is its latest member, is fully behind a plan of prior actions, authored and hammered out in Kingston, Jamaica. That plan of prior actions has been embraced at the wider Organization of American States. Several states have been intimately involved in the process including the United States of America, Canada, France and the European Union as well as the countries that meet under the rubric the Friends of Haiti. We sincerely thank them all for their support. The plan is designed to ensure that the constitution of Haiti, both the letter and the spirit, is respected by all the parties within Haiti. It has been fully agreed and embraced by the Government of Haiti.

In a few hours, representatives at a Ministerial and Vice Ministerial level expect to travel to Haiti to speak with the leaders of Haiti both the Government and the democratic Opposition with a view to delineating in more specific detail, including dates and time lines, the execution of the plan. It is envisaged that there will be substantial progress in the execution of specific objectives by the Government of Haiti by the time of the intercessional meeting of Caricom on 26th March in Antigua and Barbuda.

The plan calls for the continued constitutional role of the President, but a fully functioning constitutional role of a Prime Minister and Cabinet. It also calls for the Opposition's cooperation in drawing up rules for demonstrations and their engagement which has been heretofore rejected in the movement toward free and fair elections. The professionalization of the Haitian National Police, and additional security and economic support are integral parts of the plan. It calls for disarmament by the Government of all gangs who have weapons and who are a threat to public order and democracy. The plan incorporates all the proposals of the relevant OAS resolutions.

While the good that comes from all of this to the country of Haiti, the region, and the hemisphere should be apparent to all, often what is logically apparent does not always follow. The international community then has several imperatives in this bargain. First, if the Government of Haiti and the democratic Opposition fulfill their commitments, the world community must in our view provide the necessary security assistance to bring immediate stability to Haiti, including helping the legitimate authority of Haiti restore law and order and disarm the elements that now seek to violently overthrow the government, and who have interrupted humanitarian assistance. Those armed gangs who seek now to overthrow the constitutional order should be urged to lay down their arms and if not they should be disarmed. Secondly, there is the need for economic assistance to allow the efforts at restoring order and stability to succeed. There is a sense of hopelessness and economic despair in Haiti that has helped to fuel the present events.

But in the immediate future, the world community in cooperation with the Haitian Government and people is the ultimate guarantor of peace and stability in Haiti. But the job of support cannot be successful unless the people of Haiti agree on a commonality of interests amongst themselves. That peace is a public good which is in the best interests of Haiti, despite the historical hatreds and dislikes, past injuries and claims which the parties within the country may have on one another. Where there is a commonality of understanding amongst Haitians on the need for political order as Haiti changes, then and only then can ultimate peace and stability come to the country.

The Bahamas which sits some 90 miles over the seas to the north of Haiti has a special interest in this matter. Instability in Haiti can cause instability in The Bahamas. A significant portion of the population in The Bahamas is either Haitian or has Haitian

roots. A migrant crisis resulting from the instability in Haiti will have an immediate effect on The Bahamas, one that would be difficult for our country to endure, and one that we believe with the will of the Haitian community and the support of the world community can be avoided.

But not only will The Bahamas suffer. Already our sister Caricom nation Jamaica has had one dozen Haitians including police officers come to their shores seeking asylum. We all know the well worn path of migrant traffic to the United States. Many times, the perilous journeys across the seas lead to the tragic loss of lives. The world community must not abandon Haiti and the Haitian people and our region to this fate again

But it is first and foremost a commitment that must be evidenced by the actions of the Haitian people. If it were not clear before that there is a need for Haitian patriots to step up to the plate, it should be crystal clear now.

I am here therefore to urge your support for the Caricom initiative to the fullest extent that your resources allow in all of the areas: security, good governance, humanitarian relief, and economic support.

I thank you Mr. President.