



GOVERNMENT OF BARBADOS

FEATURE ADDRESS

BY

THE HON. FREUNDEL STUART, Q.C., M.P.

PRIME MINISTER

AT

**THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
ROTARY DISTRICT 7030
CONFERENCE AND ASSEMBLY**

AT

THE LLOYD ERSKINE SANDIFORD CENTRE

ON

THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 2011

Master of Ceremonies

Hon. Mr. Justice Moore, Acting Chief Justice of Barbados

Members of Cabinet

Members of Parliament

Mr. John Smarge - Representative of the President of
Rotary International

Mr. Tony Watkins – District Governor

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Rotarians

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Government and people of Barbados I am delighted to welcome you to Barbados, all four hundred (400) delegates and invited guests from 14 countries of the region, attending this important Conference and Assembly. Thank you for choosing Barbados.

I welcome you as citizens of CARICOM and as regional neighbours who share a common history with us, as together we proudly assert the existence of a unique Caribbean civilization. I assure you that my Government is fully committed to regional unity and, periodic distractions notwithstanding, holds fast to its commitment to pursue the goal of realising the dream of a Single Market and Economy in this region. To the free movement of law-abiding citizens also we continue to be unreservedly committed.

I welcome you as members of the second largest (after Lions International) and undoubtedly the most outstanding Service Club in the world. Since your founding by Paul Harris and a small

group of businesspersons and professionals in Chicago in 1905, you have grown to over 1.2 million members belonging to 32,000 clubs operating in 200 countries of the world. That is no small feat that is no mean achievement.

From inception you have relentlessly pursued the vision of a better world. On several occasions in your history you have resisted the impulse to exclude and have stood up to extremist organizations in totalitarian states such as Nazi Germany and Communist Russia which were thought to be propagating ideologies of discrimination, exploitation, oppression and the denial of human rights.

Today, we are experiencing fundamental changes throughout the world. We are currently undergoing the redistribution of economic power; the release of political energy in parts of the world that control vital resources; the weakening of social institutions and the erosion of ethical values due to cultural penetration. We are therefore rightly concerned about the new challenges and threats that will emerge from this turbulence.

I am convinced that it is at times like these that enlightened and responsible Governments need to do all that is necessary to protect their people, to identify with compatible outlooks and visions, and to ensure that we proceed along the path of creating a better world. I therefore welcome this dialogue between natural allies and sincerely want to engage you more fully in the process of nation building.

I note that the stated purpose of this workshop, this conference is to provide education and training for members and to enjoy the benefits of fellowship and a sense of belonging to a praiseworthy organization. But I know that you too have your sights on the

bigger picture and that during the next three days you will be wrestling with local, regional and international issues that affect us all. This is aptly summed up in your District Theme: ***“Building Healthier Communities, Bridging Regional Cultures”***.

I am particularly impressed both by your organizational structure and your modus operandi. You have built this mighty organization from the base up, focusing on work at the club level, in the heart of the communities in which you live and work. Next you have transcended national, political and cultural boundaries to reach out to fellow human beings across the border in given geographical areas. You have asked why Dominica and Martinique or the three Guyanas should not have closer relationships based on their geographical propinquity. Finally you have established global networks to deal with global issues.

You have also ensured continuity by reaching out to young people through “Interact” for those aged 12 to 18 years and “Rotract” for those aged 18 to 30 years. You have engaged them through the Community Service Corps, Youth Exchanges, and courses of International Studies dealing with Peace and Conflict Resolution.

In my estimation however, your greatest claim to fame is your success in almost eliminating polio from the face of the earth. Within 25 years you have succeeded in ridding children of a disease that has been afflicting them, some say, since Biblical times. You have raised over half a billion dollars, by various means, won the support of wealthy sponsors like Bill Gates, and immunized over two billion children. Today, as I understand it there are only four remaining pockets where polio can be found - in Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan and India. In all these countries

local philanthropists have taken hold of the baton to help complete the task.

Let me stress that it is for these and other reasons, that Barbados and all the other jurisdictions in which you operate in the region consider you as an essential member of the Team that is needed to take us out of present recessionary conditions and on to the next stage of national and regional development.

My Government has had a clear strategy for riding out this recession. We have strengthened the safety net by protecting public sector jobs and by giving several concessions to existing businesses to help them survive the recession. We have also guaranteed continued and affordable access to basic social services with a view to ensuring that no Barbadian falls into a state of abject and soul-destroying poverty.

Above all, we have been vigorously promoting business enterprise as a means of achieving economic emancipation, one of the last road-blocks to true independence. We have beefed up the statutory micro-enterprise and small business development agencies and made access to training and start-up capital less difficult. We have also given support to the establishment of the Barbados Entrepreneurial Foundation whose goal is to make Barbados the *“number 1 Entrepreneurial Hub in the world by 2020”*.

As with all movements, however, there is a need to guard against excesses and unethical behaviour. Yes, we want to see more entrepreneurs coming forward to help create wealth and employment in the industries earmarked in Government’s Medium Term Development Strategy 2010-2014. I believe that there are opportunities for entrepreneurs to succeed in potential growth

areas like Information and Communication Technologies, the Cultural Industries, Agriculture and Sports.

But we are duty-bound to protect the public from that small coterie of sometimes unscrupulous operators whose only motive is to “get rich quick”. I would therefore like to draw on your considerable experience acquired during 106 years of inculcating high ethical standards in your members who are mainly leaders in business and the professions. Your second motto ***“They profit most who serve best”*** succinctly identifies the key to sustainable business success. I agree with you that we need an acid test like your 4-way test which encourages members in all their undertakings to ask themselves four simple questions:

- Is it the truth?
- Is it fair to all concerned?
- Will it build goodwill and better friendships?
- Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

I want to solicit your support also in tackling some of the current health threats which, if left unattended, could wipe out the social gains we have enjoyed as a nation since 1950. I have in mind the HIV/AIDS pandemic and more recently, Chronic Non Communicable Diseases. I know that this Conference is focusing on tackling Diabetes. But I want to work with you in addressing the other CNCD's including obesity and hypertension that frequently lead to stroke and heart failure.

The growing awareness of these devastating lifestyle diseases galvanized the Heads of Government of CARICOM states to hold a Special Summit in Trinidad in September 2007. The statistics revealed at the Summit were shocking. The incidence of CNCD's in the Caribbean region was the highest in the Americas. In 2005,

heart disease, diabetes, and other CNCD's accounted for over 60% of all deaths in the region, compared with 29.2% from infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, and 9.3% from injuries. In

2001 the prevalence of diabetes among adults in Barbados was 16.4%. Total amputations at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital between 2002 and 2006 were 995 for diabetics and 230 for non-diabetics. The estimated costs related to diabetes in Barbados in 2001 was US\$37.8 million and hypertension US\$72.7 million. These costs alone accounted for over 5% of the island's Gross Domestic Product.

What is disturbing about these facts is that these lifestyle diseases are preventable. Hence agreement was reached in the "Port of Spain Declaration", to use legislation, policies and programmes to make a frontal attack on this threat. The Government of Barbados is firmly committed to responding positively to all aspects of the Port of Spain Declaration and has demonstrated its commitment in several ways, like increasing the taxation on tobacco, banning smoking in public places and organizing wellness events. We look forward, therefore, to closer collaboration with you in the drive to improve health in this region.

Another major regional threat we face is that of natural disasters. This region is notorious for its vulnerability to hurricanes. Every year at least one country falls victim to a hurricane that strikes at random. Last year several countries were hit by Tropical Storm Tomas. I was delighted to note that Rotary (and our local fishermen) were among the first to respond by taking supplies of water to St. Lucia.

Do I need to remind you that the region is also prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that could precipitate tsunamis? I need not mention our sister Caribbean country Haiti or highly developed Japan to emphasize the devastation that these natural disasters can cause.

The lesson we have had, finally, to learn is that we must prepare more thoroughly for natural disasters. We have strengthened the capacity of our Department of Emergency Management, formerly known as the Central Emergency Relief Organization here in Barbados. But once again we need to get ALL stakeholders involved.

I believe that organization must begin at the local level. Our communities have been and always will be the first port of call for people who are in need. In this region, communities have sustained us when families were routinely broken up and representative government did not exist.

It is for these reasons that the hallmark policy of the Government of Barbados is to empower communities. On Saturday 26th March 2011 we launched the last 12 of 30 Constituency Councils which are designed to respond to the needs of communities across Barbados. I sincerely hope that Rotary Clubs in Barbados will find it possible to work closely with the Constituency Councils in communities where their members live and conduct their businesses.

I want to end where I began by referring to the nascent Caribbean civilization which we share. That civilization is the synthesis of cultures drawn from every continent of the earth. For over four hundred years it has been germinating.

I am convinced that the second decade of the 21st century, when a fundamental sea change is taking place among the better educated and free thinking young people of the world, is the appropriate time for us to recognize the important contribution our youth can make to the assertion of our cultural identity and to the creation of a better world. It is for this reason that we have just drafted a National Youth Policy to help sharpen skills, to boost confidence and to channel the creative energy of our youth into nation building. I know that you too recognize the importance of involving young people in your mission.

I therefore salute you as a treasured partner in making the Caribbean the paradise which it can become for ALL its people.

I wish you well in your deliberations over the next three days. While you are here, I urge you to enjoy the best of that miscellany of delights that Barbados always has on offer. Then go in peace and come back and visit us again ...and againand again.

THANK YOU.