

Welcome Remarks
By
CARICOM Secretary General,
His Excellency Mr. Edwin Carrington
At the Inauguration of the CCJ,
Queens Hall, St Ann,
Trinidad and Tobago
April 16, 2005

Your Excellency Professor George Maxwell Richards, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Dr. Jean Ramjohn Richards;
Your Excellency President Ronald Runaldo Venetiaan, President of the Republic of Suriname and Chairman of CARICOM;

Your Excellency, President Bharrat Jagdeo, President of the Republic of Guyana;
Hon. Patrick Manning, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago
Other Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community
Hon. Ministers of Government of the Caribbean Community
Rt. Hon. Justice Michael de la Bastide, President of the Caribbean Court of Justice
Hon. Justices of the Caribbean Court of Justice
Hon. Heads of Judiciary and Judges
Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Hon. Leaders of the Opposition
National and Regional Representatives
Members of the Media
Other Distinguished Ladies and Gentleman

Today, I can certainly borrow from the motto of this country – the seat of the Caribbean Court of Justice - that, together we have aspired and together we have achieved. For on this the sixteenth day of April in this year of our Lord, two thousand and five, in this culturally rich city of Port-of-Spain, we the people of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are embarking on the final leg of our historic and epoch-making journey towards our self-determination and independence.

The road has been long, with many a winding turn.

And how symbolically appropriate that we are here at Queen's Hall, for it was here, a generation or so ago (43 years), in this very month, that the **people of Trinidad and Tobago** gathered in public consultation, to forge the constitutional basis for their independence.

Today, **the Region** gathers here to commence the completion of the process of its independence, with the inauguration of the Caribbean Court of Justice(CCJ)

This Court, is **THE** Court of the Caribbean people, **BY** the Caribbean people, **FOR** the Caribbean people. It is in truth, their Voice for the vindication of their Rights.

The citizens of the Region are to be congratulated for this outstanding achievement.

In taking this step – one which surprisingly enough, was called for over a hundred years ago by one of our Regional media, the People of the Region join those in more than thirty odd countries, in North America, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, that have asserted confidence in their self-governance of all aspects of their way of life.

In our Region, to date only Guyana has taken this step.

What does the establishment of the CCJ mean for the people of the Caribbean? This Court is a critical pillar of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) - the vehicle for our sustainable development. The CSME is the most effective means by which the economies of the Region can be successfully integrated into the proposed new hemispheric and global economy. It confers considerable rights and concomitant obligations on the citizens of the Region.

The critical role of the CCJ is to uphold these rights and enforce these obligations. To this end, the Court is endowed with the exclusive authority to interpret and apply the provisions of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas – the Treaty creating the Community including the CARICOM Single Market and Economy.

The CCJ is also unique for in addition to the above-mentioned authority, the Original jurisdiction, it is endowed with an Appellate jurisdiction, thereby making it the final court for criminal and civil matters emanating from the courts of most Member States. In this role for the contracting states, it replaces the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, finally completing the break with the colonial past and bringing justice closer to the people.

To equip the court to discharge its functions, the greatest care has been taken to ensure its judicial and financial independence.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as one who has followed the long history of this journey, this occasion is for me, a source of tremendous pride. It has indeed been a long, long road, with many a winding turn. Many a time this historic goal seemed to have been slipping from our grasp! That we have finally arrived here is due to the efforts of so many. I am therefore pleased to have this opportunity today, to pay tribute to my fellow travelers. Principal among them are:

- The Lead Prime Minister for Justice and Governance, Dr the Hon. Kenny D. Anthony, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia;
- Sir David Simmons, Interim Chairman of the Regional Judicial and Legal Services Commission and Members of the Commission;

- Dr Rollin Bertrand, Chairman and Members of the Board of Trustees of the CCJ Trust Fund;
- The Preparatory Committee and its two Chairs, Sir David Simmons and Hon. Mia Mottley of Barbados;
- The Vice-Chairman of the Preparatory Committee Jamaica's Attorney General, Hon. A.J. Nicholson;
- The CCJ Inauguration Task Force under the Chairmanship of Sir David Simmons;
- The President and Staff of the Caribbean Development Bank;
- The Legal Division and the CCJ Project Coordinating Unit of the CARICOM Secretariat;
- The Government and People of Trinidad and Tobago

Allow me to pay special tribute to Hon. Justice Duke Pollard, who in his role of Legal Consultant to the CARICOM Secretariat and Director of the Legislative Drafting Facility, made a most significant contribution to the establishment of the Court. We extend heartfelt congratulations to Hon. Justice Pollard on his elevation to the Bench of the CCJ.

Finally, we also extend congratulations to the President and other Members of the Court who must now shoulder the tremendous responsibility for the effective functioning of the Court and indeed, in many ways, for the future of our Community.

May God bless this Caribbean Court of Justice and our beloved Caribbean Community.

Thank you.