



**AMBASSADOR ODEEN ISHMAEL OF GUYANA ON BEHALF OF CARICOM AT THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
THE INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER: ITS SIGNIFICANCE, APPLICABILITY AND POTENTIAL**

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Statement by Ambassador Odeen Ishmael of Guyana on Behalf of CARICOM at a Special Session of the Permanent Council of the OAS to Commemorate the First Anniversary of the Signing of the Inter-American Democratic Charter

Your Excellency President Alejandro Toledo of Peru, Distinguished Foreign Minister of Uruguay, Distinguished Deputy Foreign Minister of Costa Rica, Chairman of the Permanent Council, Secretary General, Assistant Secretary General, Ambassadors, Members of Delegations, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today, as we mark the first anniversary of the signing of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, I take the floor to speak on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) on the Charter's significance, applicability and potential.

The Inter-American Democratic Charter underscores the essence of the Organization of American States (OAS) incorporating as it does key elements of the nature and purpose of the OAS Charter in respect of, inter alia, the following goals: (1) strengthening the peace and security of the continent; (2) promoting and consolidating representative democracy, with due respect for the principle of non-intervention; and (3) eradicating extreme poverty, which constitutes an obstacle to the full democratic development of the peoples of the hemisphere.

This initiative of formulating the Charter, spearheaded by the Government of Peru at the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec last year, was embraced by all CARICOM Member States. We welcomed the opportunity to participate in the enriching path that led to the adoption of this important document one year ago.

CARICOM Member States are proud of the reputation of being upholders of the principles of democracy which are well enshrined in all our constitutions. In fact, representative institutions existed in our countries from as early as the seventeenth century. That tradition has remained with our subregion as our countries evolved from colonial status to independence over the course of the last forty years. We are always proud to point out that among the oldest legislative institutions in the British Commonwealth are the Parliaments of The Bahamas and Barbados.

In an effort to further guide the Community along this democratic path, CARICOM Heads of Government adopted the CARICOM Charter of Civil Society. The CARICOM Charter of Civil



Society is based on concepts such as good governance; fundamental human rights; respect for cultural and religious diversity; equality before the law; human dignity; the rights of women and children; workers' rights; environmental rights and awareness; and participation in the economy C to name but a few of the areas addressed in that Charter.

Both the CARICOM Charter and the Inter-American Democratic Charter are representative of the intrinsic value placed on solid systems of democracy in the evolution and development of our countries and of the region.

The Inter-American Democratic Charter is particularly significant as it underscores the nexus between socioeconomic issues, (such as poverty, education, the environment and health), and the flourishing of democratic principles. These elements go hand in hand and cannot exist in isolation.

When we speak of "strengthening the peace and security of the continent", I want to state very clearly that CARICOM States view security as multidimensional in nature. It encompasses issues related to drug trafficking, organized crime, HIV/AIDS and other public health concerns, poverty, the environment and natural disasters. All of these problems take a heavy socioeconomic toll on our small countries, and addressing them is a critical element in solidifying the culture of democracy in our states.

Attacking poverty and underdevelopment, from which often emerge other human security threats, has been an integral aspect of the Organization of American States. It is in this respect that we believe that there must be a New Global Human Order aimed at reversing the growing disparities between rich and poor, both among and within countries, since it offers a viable solution to many of the global social and economic ills.

The idea for the establishment of a New Global Human Order, first enunciated at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 by the late President Cheddi Jagan of Guyana, has since then been endorsed by a number of international fora, including the Caribbean Community, the Movement of Non-Aligned countries, and by the Group of 77 in its South Summit Declaration. In November 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 55/48 on the role of the United Nations in promoting a New Global Human Order.

The proposal for a New Global Human Order is in keeping with the broad aims of the Charter of the Organization of American States. It seeks to promote a strong political consensus and a broad-based global partnership to combat poverty and promote human development throughout the world through a long-term and integrated approach to development. To do this, the involvement of all actors, including international organizations and civil society, is crucial.

Earlier this year we learned that a survey in 16 of 17 countries of this hemisphere found that there is declining support for democracy. People are becoming concerned that despite the growth of the democratic process, their lives are not getting better. It is clear that democracy must be sustained if we are to see a reversal of the views by those who are becoming disillusioned with democracy. This process of sustaining democracy must involve as early as



possible other social, economic and judicial reforms which can help to encourage investments and economic growth. However, many of the countries of this hemisphere are hampered by the lack of financial resources, and also by disadvantages placed against their products in the international market place. Thus, it is not easy to carry out the required reforms in a hurry.

The Inter-American Democratic Charter addresses the important aspect of collaboration and consultation among Member States and undertakes to "take into consideration the contributions of civil society organizations" working in the economic, social and cultural fields. In the CARICOM sub region, CARICOM Heads of Government engaged in their first ever "Forward Together Conference" with representatives of civil society in July this year. They have committed to meeting with civil society on a regular basis in recognition of the vital role which this body plays in the development of regional, political and social policies. In the spirit of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, therefore, it is proposed that efforts be made to involve civil society in our undertakings to shore up democratic systems throughout the hemisphere.

It is significant that the Inter-American Democratic Charter should come into effect as negotiations progress for the establishment of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The FTAA itself is another illustrious and critical undertaking spawned by the Summit of the Americas process in the quest for improving the welfare of the hemisphere's citizens in the face of a globalized world. It is hoped that the principles underlying the Inter-American Democratic Charter, underscoring the intimate link between democracy and socioeconomic development, would guide the FTAA negotiations. I believe that it is well appreciated that efforts must be made to ensure that nothing derails the developmental strategies being put in place by the smallest and most vulnerable countries in this hemisphere, in which category many of our countries fall. Special consideration must therefore be given to those small economies involved in this process.

The Democratic Charter was successfully applied following the brief removal of Venezuelan President from office earlier this year in April. The hemispheric community took a principled stand based on its adherence to the Charter and sought to find a peaceful, diplomatic resolution to that situation. It resulted not only in President Hugo Chavez being returned to the political helm of his country, but also in an emphatic, resonant demonstration to the international community of the strict adherence to democratic principles by countries in our hemisphere, and of the value of multilateralism in the resolution of such a crisis.

Similarly, the situation in Haiti provoked by the events of December 17, 2001 threatened to have the Charter invoked but, since all requisite criteria for such action were absent, another course of action was resorted to by Member States. The approach taken by the hemisphere is laudable and principled based on the guidance provided by the principles enshrined in the Democratic Charter.

Provision of electoral observation missions for which there is scope in the Democratic Charter is tangible demonstration of the hemisphere's commitment to supporting the democratic process in all Member States where such a request has been made. The presence of the Observation Mission gives tacit legitimacy to the results of the elections, thereby simultaneously providing support to the democratic process and, more importantly to the people, the citizens involved in the process.



Here I want to emphasize that despite the limitations of elections, there should never be attempts to discard elections and try to arrive at Governments by non-constitutional means. Such attempts are very dangerous and destabilizing. Our citizens must defend democracy, but to do so our societies have to develop a culture of democracy to allow democracy to grow, and for our citizens to want to defend it.

It must also be stressed that the responsibility for maintaining democracy rests not only with the Governments, but with all other political parties and civil society as a whole. While we agree that Governments have a greater responsibility, they alone cannot guarantee the upholding of democracy. Social and political forces within our respective countries must take a forward step in promoting dialogue with each other to help bring about solutions to societal problems. As we all know, there is always dialogue among nations; what is greatly needed now is dialogue within nations.

To conclude, I echo the sentiments of Prime Minister Said Musa of Belize, the immediate past Chairman of CARICOM, in his comments to the Prime Minister of Spain in May this year, when he stated:

The first thing that needs to be said from the point of view of the countries of CARICOM is that we constitute, and have done for a long time, a region that has lived by democratic values and the rule of law and the steady enlargement of human rights. I say this not to blow our own trumpet: no country is above improvement in any of these areas, but because there is a tendency on the part of the industrialized world to imply that the adoption of these values is the solution to the problems of development. Were that so, the CARICOM countries of the Caribbean would have been havens of prosperity.

We look forward to working together so that the hemisphere will be a prosperous one for all countries based on clear adherence to the democratic principles enshrined in this Inter American Democratic Charter. Indeed, they form a solid base for the continued sustainable development of our region and our hemisphere.

I thank you.