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**PRESENTATION BY THE DELEGATION OF THE BAHAMAS ON:
CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CULTURAL
ENTERPRISES, CHALLENGES FACED BY CULTURAL INDUSTRIES, AND
PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE**

(Presented at the First Plenary Session held on August 25, 2005)

PANEL ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CULTURAL
ENTERPRISES, CHALLENGES FACED BY CULTURAL INDUSTRIES, AND
PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

August 25, 2005

Context: the world in a basin

The Caribbean is unique in the global context. It is a region that was possessed, occupied and invented to serve the needs of European colonial expansion. Colonization transformed the Americas from a region inhabited by indigenous peoples and cultures into the economic servant of Europe, and the economy that resulted was fully integrated from its inception into a global economy. Together with the rest of the Americas, the Caribbean provided raw materials, cheap labour, farmlands, living space, and markets for an industrializing Europe.

This state of affairs created an imbalance of economic power that obtained throughout the imperial period and continues, in pockets, into the twenty-first century. The economy of the Caribbean is embedded in the global economy; the region was central to the triangular trade in slaves, goods and capital that helped fuel the Industrial Revolution. As they were transformed from indigenous communities into plantations to grow the first cash crops to generate huge profits, the islands were resettled, local populations were devastated, and a new and unique economic and cultural landscape was created.

Throughout its history, the Caribbean has played host to almost all world cultures. Beginning with the landfall of Columbus, the Caribbean received huge numbers of Europeans, Africans, and Asians, who, together with the first nations of the region, have created a culture that is an amalgamation of all. In this it shares commonalities with the continental Americas, but it exhibits one fundamental difference. The geographical separation of the Caribbean islands, the peculiarity of its economic foundation, and the linguistic, ethnic, social and political fissures that continue within the region, pose a particular challenge to long-term sustainable development.

That is not to say that such development cannot, or is not, taking place. The challenges posed by the fragmentation of the region are also the very things that make Caribbean culture fertile. It is not for nothing that Caribbean nations refer to themselves and their cultures as *callaloo*, *pepperpot*, or other rich stews made by throwing disparate elements into a small space and applying heat. A similar colonial experience has created of the Caribbean a creative, hardy people, most of whom, have forged stable political entities out of a background not only of social and racial oppression, but also of economic dependency. The cultures that resulted from the act of survival in this environment of the plantation, of slavery, of ethnic and linguistic diversity, of social and economic inequality, of geographic difficulty are a rich mine of marketable commodities.

In this context, the preservation of cultural diversity and cultural heritage are crucial. Not only are they fundamental markers of identity and self-esteem, but they are also the raw materials from which creative industries may draw. Regional governments are growing well aware of the value, economic and social, of preserving cultural heritage, as well as of the threats to that heritage.

Cultural heritage in the Caribbean is under siege from the global media, worldwide movements towards material homogeneity through the consumption of goods and services, tourism and foreign investment, and the very prosperity they seek. To this end, governments are moving towards becoming signatory parties to relevant UNESCO Conventions, as well as pursuing increased regional cooperation, as seen in involvement in the Caribbean Single Market and Economy, the Regional Cultural Council of CARICOM, and the Caribbean Festival of the Arts.

The difficulty we face as Caribbean peoples, however, is that the colonial experience continues. It has not been abolished; it has been transformed. It is all the more insidious because it continues in a semi-conscious, almost accidental fashion, and it is no longer unidirectional; it comes not only from without, but from within. The greatest threat to Caribbean cultural diversity and sustainable development comes today not from Europe, but from within the Americas themselves.

Cultural Diversity and Sustainable Development

In a world in which mass media and global marketing are creating a kind of homogeneity across societies that is threatening cultural diversity, the plural roots of Caribbean cultures are a rich resource. The very differences that threaten the unity of the region are the things that can, if properly managed, fuel development. This marks a shift in the economic landscape of the Caribbean region, which hitherto has been focussed on the production of cash crops such as sugar, bananas and coffee, or on the mining of mineral resources such as bauxite and oil. The traditional industries of the Caribbean have maintained the dependency of the region while at the same time promising prosperity. Trinidadian oil is not exploited by Trinidadians; the companies who mine it are multinational corporations for whom Trinidad is just another wellfield. The bananas produced by the Eastern Caribbean are economically worthless without a market; the same goes for sugar. Tourism, while occupying a different space, can take much the same shape, with global corporations setting up local resorts within. Traditional industries, rooted as they are in inequalities that are as old as they are deep, have served only to maintain those inequalities, not to erase them.

Fostering small enterprises

It is creative and cultural industries that hope may be found. Throughout the Americas, these are flourishing, and Caribbean nations are already developing small cultural enterprises in the recording industry, music, crafts, festivals, fashion, and the visual and performing arts. In Jamaica, the music industry employs 15,000 people and generates \$60 million (US). In Barbados, the figure attributed to the music industry is \$15 million (US), and in the Eastern Caribbean \$20 million (US). Creative industries in Barbados in general generate in excess \$50 million (US). Fashion and the fabric arts are growing industries throughout the region, and the carnival arts generate employment and revenue throughout the region, most particularly in Trinidad and Tobago. Perhaps most notable about these industries is that, unlike the traditional ones, they employ skilled workers and allow for economic and social development, rather than maintaining structures of inequality. Unlike banana farmers, musicians and fashion designers are socially and globally mobile, and are fully integrated into the life of the metropolis. Cultural industries are more than generators of economic development; they have the potential to provide full social and national development of a quality and on a scale hitherto unknown in the region.

Challenges faced by cultural industries

The cultural industries of the Caribbean are threatened, however, by the ethos of the very global environment for which they are best suited. At a very basic level, the geographical, linguistic, economic and political fragmentation of the region work against them. While fashion can cross borders with relative ease, music is culturally embedded, and language and popular taste may be barriers to consumption. The Caribbean is not a single entity by any means, and insularity is a very real danger, regional cooperative bodies notwithstanding. At the moment, for instance, the wealthiest nations in CARICOM are cautious about embracing the proposed Caribbean Single Market and Economy, The Bahamas having withdrawn from negotiations altogether for the time being, and Barbados seeking exceptions. Beyond that, the most lucrative cultural industries require substantial capital outlay, and appeal to relatively small markets. In the music industry, reggae has the widest global appeal, having infiltrated the mainstream, and the reggae industry of Jamaica is relatively healthy. Other Caribbean musical forms, however, appeal less broadly, relying on niche markets which are stable but small. Profit margins, therefore, are narrow and fragile.

Traditionally, cultural industries have not garnered widespread governmental support in the Caribbean. Regional administrations have tended to invest most heavily in agriculture, mineral development and tourism, regarding culture as anything from a non-profit necessity to a disposable luxury. Cultural industries in most of the region have developed in the absence of broad public-sector assistance.

Even more challenging, however, are the requirements of global free-trade agreements. The concept of free trade and progressive liberalization was developed by industrial nations for whom the opening of markets is crucial. The Caribbean economic landscape has never fit this model, having been established as the supplier of raw goods to a particular market, and equally as a market for finished products. Caribbean nations are rarely major producers of any goods; they are either providers of cheap labour or consumers of global goods and services. Tariffs, which provided industrial economies with protection for their products, have functioned less as barriers to trade in the Caribbean, but rather as major sources of revenue; Caribbean people have always consumed the products of the developed world, tariffs notwithstanding.

Issues such as national treatment are even more threatening. It has already been established that in the Caribbean markets are small, costs are high and profit margins low. Cultural industries in the region are far more likely than not to seek niche markets, not mass markets. Because of this, the question of national treatment for international businesses which already have an established market for their goods, and whose goods are more than likely to be integrated into the homogeneous global market anyway, threatens to destroy cultural diversity. Caribbean products cannot compete on any level playing field with international agencies, for the playing field is not level to begin with.

Perhaps the most insidious threat to Caribbean creative industries, however, is the question of intellectual property. Caribbean cultures are traditionally oral cultures, with a communal interest in creative products. The concept of the ownership of ideas is a new one. In a world where copyright, patent and merchandising are sources of wealth and revenue, the Caribbean is disadvantaged. Throughout the region, countries lack the requisite legislative and cultural framework to negotiate adequate TRIPS agreements. What is more, countries lack the personnel and resources, both intellectual and financial, to create an adequate framework; and compounding the problem is the fact that a lack of institutional familiarity with intellectual property leads to a lack of urgency on the part

governments and decision-makers to see to their development. In the vast majority of cases, Caribbean administrations are still seeking concrete markers of development.

It is clear, then, that in a globalizing environment, what the nations of the Caribbean need more than anything is time to develop adequate social and legislative mechanisms to prepare them to meet the global marketplace. The principle of free trade is based on the assumption that the marketplace should be free to all, and not simply those who have entered it thanks to the economic and social inequalities of the past. It is in this environment that the Caribbean finds itself, and it is in this environment that Caribbean social development must be sustained.