

Remarks by ACS Secretary General, Rodolfo Sabonge, at the Official Visit of the Prime Minister of Barbados, H.E. Mia Amor Mottley to the Republic of Panama

Honourable Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley

It is for me a personal and professional honour to have the opportunity to join all the illustrious guests here present in raising a toast to **your iconic leadership and advocacy for equal voice and value on the global stage**, not only for your sovereign island state, the Republic of Barbados, but for all the states and territories of the Greater Caribbean – whether they be the great ocean states of the English, French and Dutch speaking Caribbean Community (CARICOM) or the Spanish speaking coastal states of the South and the Isthmus of Central America. **Your bold and unapologetic calls for justice and fairness; for reform and reparations; for care and concern** whether it be for our environment, the descendants of enslaved Africans or for the island and coastal communities of our Region and elsewhere that have been disproportionately disadvantaged due to the policies and practices of powerful others, have reverberated around this Region. You have brought even greater stature to the Greater Caribbean, generating respect and recognition the world over. And that is important.

But perhaps even more importantly, your unwavering insistence and outspoken cries for a new financial order that places the vulnerable and/ or misused- whether nations or peoples- at the heart of the development debate and development action, have generated self-respect and self-recognition and created a new Axis. **Not an Axis of the Willing, but an Axis of Humanity.**

Latin America and the Caribbean leaders led the clarion call for our Region to be a Zone of Peace. Your advocacy has layered that claim, in keeping with a very Caribbean ethos- rendering it a call and claim for **People Centered Peace.**

From the standpoint of a Panamanian, intimately acquainted with what it means to be a **global meeting place- a place where international agents meet and traverse naturally or purposefully** -whether it be through the trade that passes through the Panama Canal or the human caravans which traverse the isthmus in search of better, your contribution, and by you I here mean **the contribution of Barbados - in bringing humanity together, is no surprise.** The Barbadians who came to Panama to help build the Panama Canal built more than an enduring thoroughfare. The so-called *Silver Men* came with the purpose and aspiration to construct, and they stayed and integrated constructively– weaving Barbados into the very fabric of Panamanian culture.

It was a Caribbean colleague who first introduced me to the quintessential Barbadian socio-political, dare I say humanist axiom - ***Friends of All; Satellites of None***. She told me about this guiding principle just as I was transitioning: from a career as engineer and Vice President at the Panama Canal, to an entirely new career as head of the entity conceptualized thirty years ago by Caribbean leaders determined to build a fluid thoroughfare between Latin America and the Caribbean- the Association of Caribbean States. This principle is at the heart of how and why the 35 Latin American and Caribbean Members of the ACS pursue the first of its 3 mandates- Consultation. It is at the heart of how they pursue the 2nd of its 3 mandates Cooperation with over 30 Observer States and organisations. And yes, it is at the heart of how they pursue the 3rd of those mandates- Concerted Action on everything from enhanced maritime transport logistics to securing the recognition by the United Nations of the Caribbean Sea as a Special Area in the Context of Sustainable Development for Future Generations.

The coming of Barbadians to Panama to help build the Canal was natural for Barbadians. They helped make world transport and trade better. Barbadians making Panama their home and infusing and fusing their culture with the cultures they met here was equally natural. They made Panama better. Panama opening an Embassy in Barbados and vice versa is natural. Our people had integrated a long time prior. Your coming here Prime Minister, is natural- a symbol of the integration of two nations representing two sub regions- Latin America and the Caribbean, natural partners who, together comprise the Greater Caribbean.

And so I raise a toast to thoroughfares and not satellites and to friends that are really family.

Welcome home Prime Minister.