

# EL GRAN CARIBE

**Norman Girvan<sup>1</sup>**

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Memorial Lecture**

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I must start by thanking the John Clifford Sealy Foundation for the honour of inviting me to deliver this lecture and for the opportunity to ruminate on a subject of my own choosing. I never had the good fortune of knowing Cliff Sealy personally, although the fame of the Clifford Sealy Book-Shop on Marli Street and then Frederick Street spread throughout the West Indies. After reading the powerful tribute to Sealy by Winston Riley, I feel as if I did know him. He was clearly a remarkable man—a man whose sustaining sense of his own self-worth and enduring quest for self-knowledge plunged him into the world of law, politics, art, literature, theology and philosophy; a popular educator; social and political activist in the cause of the working class, national independence, and West Indies Federation; novelist, playwright; a man of letters and of books; above all, a human person that gained the respect and affection of those who knew him.

## History of “*El Gran Caribe*”

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary General, Association of Caribbean States, Port of Spain, Trinidad. Internet <http://www.acs-aec.org>. The views expressed are not necessarily the official views of the ACS.

<sup>2</sup> Secretary General, Association of Caribbean States, Port of Spain, Trinidad. Internet <http://www.acs-aec.org>. The views expressed are not necessarily the official views of the ACS.

Sealy's life was intricately bound up with the history and politics of 20<sup>th</sup> century Trinidad and Tobago. So it might be fitting for me to begin my reflections with an historical perspective on the development of the idea of the Greater Caribbean, *El Gran Caribe*, the subject of my lecture. The Puerto Rican historian Antonio Gaztambide-Geigel has argued—in my view persuasively—that the notion of a “Caribbean region” was invented by the United States at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a product of its military and economic expansion into the area<sup>3</sup>. Indeed at the time of Sealy's birth in 1927 the Caribbean hardly existed as an imagined community to those who inhabited these parts. Trinidad and Tobago was a colonial administrative entity, an integral part of the British Empire, on which the sun was never permitted to set. To conceive of this place as a society in its own right populated by free citizens owing to it their primary allegiance, as Sealy and his generation did, required a leap of faith, an act of intellectual insubordination to established authority--a conscious decision to reject the way in which the world was ordered.

As for the region, if people thought about it at all in the 1920s, it meant the British West Indies. To be West Indian meant to be a British colonial subject from the islands—black, English speaking, and the beneficiary of a British-based education—good currency in places like Panama and New York City to which many people migrated. Sealy's generation also set about replacing the colonial construct of British West Indies with the nationalist construct of West Indian nationhood. Its ultimate political expression was to be the West Indies Federation. And although the Federation collapsed, the sense of West Indian nationhood persists, as shown in the work of numerous artists, intellectuals and lyricists like the Trinidadian calypsonians Black Stalin in his “Caribbean Man” and David Rudder in his “Rally Round the West Indies”.

So that West Indian nationalism was a quantum leap for its time. But at the same time it carried the baggage of the past, for its sense of region was confined to those territories sharing the British colonial experience, especially the English language. Yet as early as

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<sup>3</sup> Antonio Gaztambide-Geigel, “La Invención del Caribe en el Siglo XX: Las definiciones del Caribe como problema histórico y metodológico”. *Revista Mexicana del Caribe*, 1 (1996), 74-96.

the 1930s and 1940s the seeds of a broader pan-Caribbean consciousness were being planted in series of books by anti-colonial and anti-imperial scholar/activists<sup>4</sup>: CLR James and Eric Williams of Trinidad, the Jamaican W. Adolphe Roberts and the Colombian Germán Arciniegas.

These seminal works pioneered a view of the Caribbean that transcended language and colonial ties and focused on shared historical experience: decimation of the indigenous people, metropolitan rivalry and wars, the plantation system, slavery and indentureship. In the post-war decades these insights were fleshed out by successive generations of scholars. Professional historians analysed slave societies, creolisation, popular resistance and political struggle. They engendered history into herstory. Sociologists and cultural anthropologists analysed ethnicity and cultural diversity, race and class, and pluralism. Political economists analysed the plantation system, dependency, and multinational corporations. Caribbean history, Caribbean society, Caribbean economy—they all became sub-disciplines.

The new awareness seeped into the popular consciousness. By the 1960s, in the aftermath of constitutional independence, Anglophones had started to call themselves and their institutions “Caribbean” rather than “West Indian”. Note how the *West Indies* Federation gave way to the *Caribbean* Community—CARICOM. Today we have a host of other “Caribbean” organisations: the CXC, CAREC, CARIRI, the CTO and many others. No matter that the membership of most of these institutions is exclusively or mainly Anglophone. What is significant is the subtle shift in proclaimed identity.

Many have noted the remarkable coincidence of the virtually simultaneous publication, in 1970, of two histories of the Caribbean with almost the same title, both authored by scholar/statesmen: the one in English by Dr. Eric Williams<sup>5</sup>, then Prime Minister of

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<sup>4</sup> C.L.R James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. London: Secker and Warburg, 2<sup>nd</sup> Rev. ed. 1963; (First published 1938); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944; W. Adolphe Roberts, *The Caribbean: The Story of our Sea of Destiny*, New York, The Bobbs-Merill Company, 1940; German Arciniegas *Caribbean, Sea of the New World*, New York, A.A. Knopf, 1946 ; p. 247;

<sup>5</sup> Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1970

Trinidad and Tobago, the other in Spanish by Juan Bosch<sup>6</sup>, a former President of the Dominican Republic. Both books adopted a consciously anti-colonial or anti-imperialist perspective. But there was a crucial difference between them. Eric Williams followed the definition of the Caribbean by then accepted among Anglophone scholars, as constituting the Spanish, English, French and Dutch-speaking islands plus the three Guianas and Belize. This definition remains prevalent in Anglophone historiography and has recently been entrenched in UNESCO's prestigious *General History of the Caribbean*<sup>7</sup>.

Juan Bosch on the other hand defined the Caribbean as

“...las islas antillanas que van en forma de cadena desde el canal de Yucatán hasta el golfo de Paria; la tierra continental de Venezuela, Colombia, Panamá y Costa Rica; la de Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Belice y Yucatán, y todas las islas, los islotes, y los cayos comprendidos dentro de esos límites. (Bosch 1999, p. 34)

(“...the islands of the Antilles that stretch in the form of a chain from the Yucatan channel to the Gulf of Paria; the continental land of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama and Costa Rica; that of Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Belize and Yucatan, and all the islands, islets, and cays enclosed within these limits.”)

Prof. Bridget Brereton of UWI has characterised this as the “Hispanic” definition of the Caribbean, since it is the one employed by most Spanish language historians<sup>8</sup>. Notably, Bosch explicitly excluded the Bahamas from his definition because “they were not considered at any time to be part of the Caribbean and were not therefore, a territory of the imperial frontier” (34). He also left out El Salvador, on the Pacific shore of Central America, and the Guianas, presumably because their shoreline is, strictly speaking, Atlantic rather than Caribbean. In that sense the Bosch definition was geographic rather than socio-cultural in its orientation. For our purposes what is important is the broader view of the Caribbean that it shared with the earlier work of Arciniegas and Roberts.

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<sup>6</sup> Juan Bosch, *De Cristóbal Colon a Fidel Castro: el Caribe, Frontera Imperial*. Santo Domingo, 1999 (10<sup>th</sup> Dominican Edition); p. 34 (First published 1970)

<sup>7</sup> See note 7.

It was some time before this broader view gained currency among English speakers. The turning point was clearly the Report of the Independent West Indian Commission in 1992. The debate had been raging in CARICOM on the relative merits of “deepening” the Community—strengthening the internal integration, vs. “widening” it—expanding its membership to non-English speaking countries of Suriname, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and possibly Cuba. The West Indian Commission recommended a somewhat ingenious compromise: deepen CARICOM, but widen functional cooperation by creating an Association of Caribbean States with a potential membership of all the independent states and non-independent territories in the entire Caribbean Basin<sup>9</sup>.

Our view is that CARICOM should remain the inner core of our relationships in the Region, and that we should consciously create space beyond membership of CARICOM for development of CARICOM’s integrationist relationships with Caribbean countries from Central America to Suriname, from Cuba to Venezuela...

What we see and propose is a new Association of Caribbean States—the ACS—anchored on CARICOM and promoted by CARICOM...

We see this Association of Caribbean States as being functionally active in an integration sense...We believe that it should be the means of our creating within the wider Caribbean special trading and functional cooperation arrangements on terms to be negotiated—terms which will recognise the relative weakness of CARICOM economies in relation to some of the larger partners like Cuba and the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Venezuela.(*Overview*, pp. 59-60)

It was at this moment that the “Hispanic” and the “Anglophone” definitions of the Caribbean intersected, if not exactly converged. The marriage of the two produced a hybrid offspring that has come to be known as *El Gran Caribe* in Spanish, “The Greater Caribbean” in English. From here on we will use both terms interchangeably to refer to the entire Basin: all of the islands including the Bahamas, and the entire littoral including

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<sup>8</sup> Bridget Brereton, “Regional Histories”, in B.W. Higman (ed.) *General History of the Caribbean: Volume VI: Methodology and Historiography of the Caribbean*. London and Oxford: UNESCO Publishing/Macmillan Education, 2000; pp. 316-317.

<sup>9</sup> *Overview of the Report of the West Indian Commission—Time for Action*. Barbados: The West Indian Commission, 1992; p. 59. There is some ambiguity in the use of the term “wider Caribbean” in the *Overview*: initially it is used to refer to the insular Caribbean beyond CARICOM, with 32 million people (p. 58); on p. 60 however there is a reference to the “wider Caribbean including the littoral”, which seems to make it synonymous with “the region of the Caribbean Basin” as defined on p. 59, which includes Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Central America.

Mexico, the whole of Central America, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. Its institutional expression is the ACS, launched in 1994<sup>10</sup>.

Like any hybrid, the project to establish the Greater Caribbean as a meaningful geo-economic or geo-political force is experiencing its growing pains. In the rest of this lecture I wish to talk about some of the issues and the obstacles, the challenges, and above all, the opportunities. The obstacle of language, issues of culture and identity, challenges arising from economic diversity and differing trade agendas, and opportunities for functional cooperation in the areas of trade, transport, sustainable tourism, and the effects of global climate change.

### Language

Many people are surprised when it is pointed out that in the insular Caribbean English speakers are outnumbered by Spanish speakers in a ratio of almost four to one; and also by French or at least Creole speakers. In the Greater Caribbean Anglophones are only 3 percent of the population. If English speakers often overlook this awkward fact, it may be because at official meetings Anglophone states are in the overwhelming majority in CARICOM and CARIFORUM and account for nearly half of the total number of delegations in the ACS<sup>11</sup>. In addition, there is the fact that in the world as a whole English has become the *lingua franca* of diplomacy, international business and the Internet. As a general rule English speakers don't have to make the effort to learn other languages, and when necessary they rely on translation and interpretation services.

We need to take into account, however, that language is a carrier of culture and that the subtleties of meaning are often lost on a literal translation. Moreover as anyone with

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<sup>10</sup> The ACS Convention opens full membership to all of the states mentioned above and Associate membership to all the non-independent territories whether Dutch, English, French or United States affiliated. All of the independent states (25 in number) have become full members; Associate members so far include Aruba, the Netherlands Antilles, and France in respect of Guadeloupe, Guyane and Martinique.

<sup>11</sup> Anglophone states are 13 out of 15 members in CARICOM and 12 out of 15 in CARIFORUM. (Montserrat is a member of CARICOM but not CARIFORUM while the Dominican Republic is a member of CARIFORUM but not CARICOM. The other non-Anglophone members of both organisations are Suriname and Haiti. In the ACS, Anglophone states are 12 out of 25 full and three associate members.

some experience in international meetings knows, there is a world of difference between a good translation and a bad translation. When I took office in the ACS one of my promises was to try to “build bridges” among the various language groups in the association. We discovered to our embarrassment that the French translation of my speech had me building “breaches”.

Somebody once suggested that technology could help, and referred me to an Internet website offering free text translation services using a computer programme. I tried it, but took the precaution of running a sample passage through the programme in both directions, first from English into Spanish and then from the Spanish translation back into English, to see how much of the original English meaning had been preserved. I was interested to find that my reference to “the private sector of the Caribbean basin” had been translated into the Spanish equivalent of “the deprived sector of the Caribbean washbasin”.

There is also the fact that in any country much of the really valuable information on politics, business and culture is available only in the native language: in newspapers, in books, in reports and in its popular culture. To understand a country’s language is the key to understanding the way the people behave and think and view the world. From this point of view the dominance of the English language actually becomes a disadvantage to English speakers, who are generally not forced to learn other languages—others may come to understand more about us than we of them.

The lesson is clear—the real effort in this area needs to come from the *Angloparlantes*. In fact there is a great interest in learning Spanish among in the English speaking Caribbean--my information is that the classes offered by this institute are regularly oversubscribed. A similar situation obtains in Jamaica. Perhaps there is scope for more private sector involvement in language training to meet the excess demand. Immersion courses in Spanish for English speakers also do very well in places like Colombia, Mexico and Costa Rica. At the ACS, we have a project for the development of a common curriculum for the teaching of the main regional languages in educational institutions. I

believe myself that this approach will take a long time to show results in actual language facility for people who need it the most—young people, businesspeople, officials in governments, official agencies and NGOs. What we do need is a great deal more immersion courses targeted at these groups.

My impression is that we English speakers have an unnecessary phobia about learning foreign languages, especially as we tend to associate this with formal education and the taking of examinations. I was talking about this issue in an interview with a journalist on a recent visit to St Maarten, when he related to me the following. His mother had never finished primary school but spoke more languages than he did, though a University graduate. She spoke Spanish because she was born in the Dominican Republic, French because she lived in French St Martin and had attended school there, Papiamentu and Dutch because she sold produce on the Dutch side of the island, and English because, in his words, “its her native language”--her parents had been from St Kitts.

### Diversity and Identity

This brings me to the subject of ethnic and cultural diversity, a feature in which the Greater Caribbean may well be unique in the world. We have European, in its Hispanic, Anglo-Saxon, French, Dutch and Portuguese, versions. We have African; we have Amerindian; from Asia have come East Indians, Chinese and Javanese; from the Middle East have come Syrians, Lebanese and Jews. Then there are the mixtures: mestizos, mulattoes—in Jamaica called “brownings”—“indios”—a term peculiar to the Dominican Republic which does not mean Indian but appears to refer to any person of colour—douglas—I had a hard time explaining to a Jamaican visitor that in this country that is not a man’s name-- and best of all “nowhereians”, an exquisitely Trinidadian term that refers to people who do not fit into the any of the accepted categories.

It used to be fashionable to speak of the existence of something called a “Caribbean identity” underlying this diversity, or encompassing it. Nowadays we are more inclined to accept the reality of many cultural identities coexisting within a society and more so

within a region, and even within a single individual. Of course anyone who has been to a Caribbean party is immediately struck by the extent to which rhythm is a common medium of expression of Caribbean people from different places and ethnicities. Reggae, calypso, soca, salsa and merengue are far closer than is often recognised—rhythmically, they are first cousins with common African roots.

But rhythm is not the totality of our reality: what it may do is provide a place of encounter for different cultural elements. The reality is diversity, and surely this it is to be welcomed, indeed celebrated. It would be a boring Caribbean indeed if we were all the same. For the same reason I believe it is mistaken to think of creating a specific Caribbean identity by means of something called “cultural integration”<sup>12</sup>. Indeed it might even be dangerous, for this lofty ideal begs the question of integration into what, on whose terms, and who will be the arbiter of what constitutes the integral Caribbean culture. Would it not be far more sensible to speak of cultural understanding, interaction and exchange; of mutual respect for, and tolerance of, cultural differences; and of the practice of cultural compromise and consensus? At the end of the day, our inescapable common reality is the space that we inhabit: islands and littoral, and the sea that we share. You only have to look at what is happening at this very moment in other parts of the world to realise how fortunate we are in having a relatively peaceful ethnic and cultural coexistence in the Caribbean. But it is a precious condition that needs to be carefully and constantly nurtured, for once lost it cannot easily be restored, and the consequences can be quite devastating.

### Economic diversity

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<sup>12</sup> *Note:* Since preparing this lecture I have had an opportunity to read in full the text of Professor Amartya Sen’s Eric Williams Memorial Lecture “Identity and Justice” delivered at the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, March 23, 2001. In it, Sen argues lucidly that the creation of a Caribbean identity does not necessarily mean the obliteration of existing separate cultural identities, since all persons have multiple identities in any case. However, the problem of what constitutes this Caribbean identity remains, since Sen appears to make it synonymous with the Caribbean political integration called for by Eric Williams in the final chapter of *From Columbus to Castro*. There is an ongoing discourse on “creolisation” as the basis of a Caribbean identity, but this is often interpreted as involving the melding of other ethnic or cultural identities into the Creole culture, which is precisely the source of the difficulty that some have with the idea.

Let us turn now to economic matters. A major issue for the Greater Caribbean is the existence of different, and sometimes conflicting, trade negotiation agendas arising from the wide diversity in size, levels of economic development, and foreign trade structures. Within the region it is customary to distinguish four sub-groups. First, the large countries of the Group of Three: Mexico, which is a member of NAFTA; and Colombia and Venezuela, which are members of the Andean Community. Second, Central America with its common market, where the US and Mexico are the largest external trading partners. Third, CARICOM where there is an important relationship with the EU under the Cotonou accord, but where the US is also a significant export market for the MDCs, while the smaller economies rely heavily on tourism and offshore banking. Finally there are the non-grouped countries of Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Panama, Cuba is excluded from the US market by the embargo; the Dominican Republic being a member both of CARIFORUM and the Central American integration system; and Panama strongly oriented towards Central America and the United States market.

These crosscutting relationships have made it difficult to develop functional cooperation in external trade negotiations or a free trade area within the Greater Caribbean, which were among the ideas behind the creation of the ACS. For example, the relationship of the CARICOM/CARIFORUM countries with the European Union has absorbed much of their negotiation attention and resources over the past four years, and will continue to do so. It has also been a source of considerable friction with Central America arising out of the banana dispute between the United States and the European Union.

There are also different agendas with respect to the FTAA, on issues such as special treatment for the smaller economies, and on the pace of negotiations. Mexico's position is influenced by its NAFTA membership, those of Colombia and Venezuela by their membership in the Andean Community. CARICOM negotiates as a bloc; but even within this grouping there are subtle differences between the positions of the larger countries, for which access to the US market is important; and the smaller ones, which export mainly to the EU or depend mainly on services, and which stand to lose fiscal revenue from trade liberalization. Central America does not even negotiate as a bloc in the FTAA at all—

Costa Rica's position often diverges significantly from the others. And of course Cuba has so far been excluded from the FTAA negotiations.

I have come to view myself that a more fruitful approach might be to focus on enabling and promoting the expansion of intra-trade within the Greater Caribbean region. The scope for this is suggested by the fact that existing ACS intra-trade is only 8 percent of the foreign trade of the member states, and about half of this is intra-trade within the existing four sub-groups. During the 1990s intra-ACS trade also grew at an annual rate of 9.7 percent compared to the 13.8 percent growth rate of the group as a whole. The latest available data show that exports of ACS countries to other ACS countries are at present 7.3 percent of their total exports<sup>13</sup>. In MERCOSUR, the comparable figure is between 20 and 25 percent; in the Andean Community, 10-14 percent; in the Central American Common Market, around 20 percent<sup>14</sup>; in CARICOM, it is 24 percent. For the countries of the Association of Southeast Nations, ASEAN, the comparable figure is 21 percent<sup>15</sup>.

Given the geographical proximity of ACS countries; seven percent seems woefully small, even in the absence of a generalised free trade arrangement within the entire group. The goal should be to at raise this percentage by expanding trade among the different sub-groups. A doubling of the percentage of intra-trade, for instance, would take it to a modest 14 percent of total foreign trade, but would mean an additional \$30 billion in trade business. To achieve this would require a three-fold increase in trade among the different sub-groups.

The countries of the ACS have already achieved a substantial amount of trade liberalisation among themselves through a network of bilateral and sub-regional free trade agreements: among the Group of 3; Mexico with most of Central America; Central America internally and with the Dominican Republic; CARICOM internally and with Venezuela, Colombia, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. Perhaps it is time to pay

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<sup>13</sup> Data compiled in the ACS Secretariat.

<sup>14</sup> Data from José Antonio Ocampo, "Pasado, Presente y Futuro de la Integración Regional", Paper presented at Foro INTAL: 35 Anos de Compromiso con la Integración Regional. Buenos Aires, 27-28 Noviembre 2000; Cuadro 1.

greater attention to the non-tariff obstacles to trade: things that make it difficult and costly for firms to do business with one another in unfamiliar markets; such as customs procedures, regulations and standards, packaging, distribution networks, information. We at the ACS Secretariat are presently conducting studies on this problem with a view to making recommendations to Governments on measures that would reduce the transaction costs of trading within the region.

Three particular areas merit special attention. One is language, which I have already mentioned. There is no doubt in my mind that facility in the Spanish language among our business elites would do a great deal for accelerated trade and investment within the region. Second are opportunities for business contact. The potential here is shown by the enormous interest generated by the ACS Business Forum of the Greater Caribbean held in Margarita Island, Venezuela, last October. Over 300 firms and 400 businesspersons attended, including a significant contingent from Trinidad and Tobago and other Eastern Caribbean countries. The third area, that I want to say a little more about, is transport.

### Transport

Research carried out for the ACS shows that the proportion of transport costs in the total cost of imports for the countries of the Greater Caribbean is two to three times the world average. In other words transport costs are 10 to 15 percent the cost of imports for Greater Caribbean countries compared to a world average of around 5 percent, and an overall Latin American average of around 7 percent. Within the Greater Caribbean, the cost is highest for CARICOM countries, 12 percent on average<sup>16</sup>.

Why is this? Essentially because of the trend towards ever larger cargo ships, containerisation, and the growing role of transshipment in maritime cargo. Perversely, the operation of economies of scale and falling unit costs in maritime transport has hurt smaller countries, because they now have to import a higher proportion of their cargo via

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<sup>15</sup> Data compiled in the ACS Secretariat.

transshipment ports, bearing these extra costs. This increases the average cost of intra-regional shipping in a region such as ours, which has a small number of relatively large countries and a large number of relatively small countries. In effect, the port of Miami has become the principal transshipment centre for the Greater Caribbean—the main hub of maritime transport for the region.

What is the answer? We in the ACS believe that costs can be reduced if we make better use of port facilities *within* the region. A number of regional ports have already been expanding their capacity to handle containerised shipping in a bid to establish themselves as major transshipment centres: Cartagena in Colombia, Coco Solo and Manzanillo in Panama, Kingston Jamaica, Santiago de Cuba, Puerto Cabello in Venezuela, Port of Spain, Bridgetown. One unintended result of this has been low utilization of capacity and higher unit costs.

Governments in the region, in their capacity as owners or investors in port facilities, will need to work closely with one another and with the shipping lines serving the Caribbean with the aim of securing higher capacity utilization and reduced unit costs. Another action that would help is to make more information on existing port facilities in the region accessible to shippers and freight forwarders, utilising up to date technology. Development of multi-modal transport, which combines maritime, air, road and rail, would also increase the speed of intra-Caribbean shipments and make sourcing within the region more attractive to importers. These are all areas in which action is being taken within the ACS framework, working with the Caribbean Shipping Association, one of the principal private sector organisations in maritime transport within the region.

Air transport is another area in which we need to do much more. Recently a Cuban Vice Minister took 30 hours to travel from Havana to a meeting in Guadeloupe, via Caracas, Port of Spain and St Maarten. Her French counterpart, travelling from Paris, took one-third of the time to travel three times the distance. Similar horror stories among regional

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<sup>16</sup> Data taken from “Maritime Transport in the Caribbean”, Report prepared by Jan Hoffman, ECLAC, for Meeting of ACS Special Committee on Transport, Cancun, 18.6.1998.

officials abound. Our database on air travel facilities tells us why. There is no country within the ACS that has regularly scheduled direct daily flights to every other country, or one which even remotely approaches this ideal. Barbados, which comes closest, has a daily service with only 28 percent of the other major ACS airports, and most of these are with its neighbours in the Eastern Caribbean. Panama, which is next, serves 25 percent which is mostly in Central America. Barbados and Panama are *de facto* hubs within their respective sub-regions; but there is no direct service between these two points, or between any two points in the Eastern Caribbean and Central American sub-regions at all.

So which is the city with the most daily services to major ACS airports? You guessed it: Miami, with 64 percent, followed by San Juan Puerto Rico, with 43 percent<sup>17</sup>. In other words, a similar situation obtains as with maritime transport: Miami is the *de facto* hub of the Greater Caribbean. Small wonder that some people take the view that Miami is not only a Caribbean city, but is its true capital city! Some would doubtless argue that this is inevitable and even desirable, in the age of globalisation. But this is a road that leads to increased concentration of wealth, income, education and job opportunities at one geographical pole, while the hinterland regions of the Caribbean basin are left behind in persistent poverty. None of us born in the region has an automatic right to live in Florida, or to work there, or to study there, or to vote there. So national, sub-regional and regional development will remain important for the provision of opportunities to our population.

But I digress. In the subject area of air transport, what is emerging is the scope for development of points such as Barbados and Panama City as major sub-regional hubs that are directly linked to one another and with a network of subsidiary hubs based in other major transit points such as Port of Spain, Caracas, Bogotá, Guatemala City, Mexico City, Havana, Montego Bay, San Juan, and St John's Antigua.

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<sup>17</sup> Data from Consultant's Report prepared for the ACS Special Committee on Transport submitted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of CEOs of Regional Airlines, Port of Spain, September 1999

One issue that requires urgent attention is the regulatory regime in the form of air services agreements, which are mostly designed to protect the interests of national carriers rather than to facilitate economical and convenient intra-regional travel. This has to change: existing agreements will need to be modified or better still, a regional agreement on the matter which liberalises traffic rights and provides incentives for the development of intra-regional services should be negotiated. Already, the ACS Ministerial Council has approved a document embodying the Principles of a Common Air Transport Policy in the Caribbean Region. Now the focus is on negotiating a legally binding agreement on an ACS Air Transport Policy that would provide the framework for the development of intra-Caribbean services. The draft of such an agreement is already prepared, and will be the subject of a special meeting in early May.

Second, the existing sub-regional carriers like BWIA, Air Jamaica, and COPA and TACA in Central America, will need to cooperate with one another in matters such as code sharing, service scheduling on major routes, frequent flier programmes, bulk purchase of supplies and sharing in ground services. Our experience in the ACS in trying to promote this suggests that it is not easy to achieve, for there are several tricky issues involved. There is a need for regional airlines to look at the bigger picture, to temper their competitive rivalries by considering the potential gains from collaborating across the region as a whole. It should not be difficult to work out which airline is the principal beneficiary of travel within the Greater Caribbean region. I will give you one clue; it is not a Caribbean airline, it is an American airline!

### Tourism

The subject of air travel leads directly to that of tourism. Perhaps I should have started with this because everything that I have seen confirms the central importance assigned to cooperation in tourism by the founders of the ACS. In 16 of our countries tourism is the single largest earner of foreign exchange, in 11 of these it exceeds earnings from all merchandise exports combined. Already nearly 19 million tourists visit the ACS region annually (in Mexico this includes only Cancun and Cozumel,) spending \$15 billion; a

world market share for the region of around 3 percent<sup>18</sup>. The share was falling in the 1980s, more recently it has been growing but mainly because of the rapid expansion of two destinations--Cuba and the Dominican Republic. In the world as a whole, the growth rate for the industry has been on a downward trend.

One of the main challenges for us in tourism is assuring sustainability. Visitors are becoming ever more discriminating about the quality of the tourist product. They want good service and value for money. They want a clean environment. They want to feel safe, and they don't want to be hassled. The more experienced are bored with fire-eaters and limbo dancers, they want quality entertainment that is culturally authentic, and to experience eco-tourism and heritage tourism. The Caribbean is unique among regions in the diversity of attractions it offers: sun, sea and sand, tropical rainforests and rivers, spectacular mountain chains, semi-active volcanoes, architecture of the Maya, Aztec, and Spanish colonial variety, and of course a wide variety of music, dancing and Carnivals.

The path to long-term sustainability in tourism is by way of developing and maintaining internationally accepted standards of excellence in every department: in service, in environmental quality, in the involvement of the community, in respect for cultural integrity and diversity, and in multi-destination tourism that makes use of the variety of cultural and natural attractions. This is the basis for presenting the entire Greater Caribbean region to the world as a Zone of Sustainable Tourism.

At the ACS, work is well advanced on the elaboration of quantitative indicators of sustainable tourism and a complementary legally binding instrument among governments on the designation and monitoring of destinations meeting the criteria of the Sustainable Tourism Zone. These are necessary to make operational the concept of Sustainable Tourism—to give the policy instruments teeth. But this road is not easy or conflict-free. It will mean acceptance of the need for regulation backed up with legal measures worked out between governments and the private sector and among governments themselves. It will require broad recognition of the value of strict adherence to common standards,

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<sup>18</sup> Data compiled by the ACS Secretariat.

tempering the desire for quick returns with longer-term considerations. There is a major job of public education and consciousness-raising to be undertaken here, in which all of us can play a part.

### Climate change and natural disasters

Which leads naturally to the issue of the environment. The Caribbean Sea is after all, the common heritage of all people in the Greater Caribbean, the one natural asset that we all share, that divides, but also binds. But our coastal and marine environment is increasingly being impacted by the consequences of global warming and associated climate change. Some of these consequences, according to the most prestigious international scientific bodies, include increasing frequency and severity of storms, hurricanes, heavy rainfall, droughts and floods; coastal settlement flooding and contamination; loss of fertile fish breeding grounds; destruction of coral reefs; and accelerated spread of infectious diseases carried by vector insects, such as malaria, dengue, and cholera. Combined with the spread of human settlements on marginal lands due to demographic pressure, these also increase the incidence of deforestation, soil erosion, and devastating mudslides<sup>19</sup>.

The recent catalogue of climate-associated natural disasters in our region is chilling<sup>20</sup>:

- 1998: (i) hurricane Mitch: over 9,000 dead and \$6 billion in damage in Central America; (ii) hurricane Georges: in Antigua and Barbuda, 400 houses destroyed and 3,000 damaged; 3,400 made homeless; EC\$4 million damage to public schools; Dominica also affected;
- 1999: (i) hurricane Floyd: severe damage in the several islands of the Bahamas; (ii) hurricane Lenny: Antigua and Barbuda hit again; (iii) sustained heavy rains in Venezuela provoked mudslides that took an estimated 25,000 lives and damage estimated at \$3.2 billion; (iv) in Colombia flooding also took 1,185 lives and caused \$1.5 billion in damage.

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<sup>19</sup> GEO- Latin America and the Caribbean - *Environment Outlook* – UNEP 2000, pp. 56-57

<sup>20</sup> Data on natural disasters compiled by the ACS Secretariat.

Unfortunately, we can expect that these episodes will continue, and perhaps worsen. The imperative of regional cooperation in disaster management, relief and mitigation is self-evident. At the ACS work is well advanced in this area. But more than this is needed—the Caribbean region as a whole will need to speak out loudly and with one voice, in international fora, on the need for international action to stem the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that produce global warming and climate change. The recent decision of the US Administration to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions is a major set-back, but the battle on this question is far from over. My own personal view is that environmental questions should be much more integrally an element of collective external diplomacy at the regional level.

### Conclusion

I think I have said more than enough to try your patience and understanding. In all these areas, the issues and the needs are similar: the need for close working relationships among governments, the private sector, and civil society; the need for intergovernmental agreement on legally binding instruments, to turn lofty declarations into concrete actions; the need for better public education, and increased awareness; above all, the need to expand our frame of reference, to think of the Greater Caribbean as our collective home.

Let us, to be sure, be practical and pragmatic. But, like John Clifford Sealy and his peers, let us also be bold and visionary.