



STATEMENT

BY the

Prime Minister of The Bahamas and Chairman of the Conference
of Heads of Government of CARICOM

Rt. Hon. Perry G. Christie,

at the

2015 Integration Segment of the Economic and Social Council:
Achieving Sustainable Development through Employment Creation
and Decent Work

30 MARCH 2015

Vice President of ECOSOC,
President of the General Assembly,
Colleague heads
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to the Vice President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for inviting me to participate at the opening of this Integration Segment of the Council. It is indeed an honour to speak on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) on this most auspicious occasion.

Mr Vice President,

CARICOM States are acutely aware of the complexity of the global economic environment and the major transformations underway in the world economy. Indeed, the aftermath of the global economic and financial crises has translated into a less than favourable international context for small island developing States (SIDS) in the CARICOM Region into much of the next decade or so.

Additionally, the process of climate change has emerged as a global issue, with the increased frequency and severity of climatic events, along with the growing incidence of health pandemics and the risk of terrorism and war

threatening to set back the development gains achieved over time by developing countries in particular.

Given its susceptibility to external shocks, the global realities and challenges are either mirrored or heightened in the CARICOM Region, evidenced in persistent low growth rates and crippling external debt, as well as in growing unemployment, especially among our youth.

I pause here to pay special tribute to the youth of Caricom and once again to pledge the commitment of all governments in the region to address the issue of the integration of young people into our economies. The future of our societies depend on success in this area. I come therefore today to speak for them.

CARICOM has adopted either home-grown or multilaterally-supported stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes, which have not yet resulted in sustained growth in those Member States experiencing significant macro-economic imbalances. Revitalizing economic growth is therefore of critical importance to preventing further deterioration in the Region's human development gains and thus the Region has embarked on a plan to reposition itself.

It is apparent that such a plan must take into consideration the rising levels of unemployment, particularly in the youth, which exists alongside skill shortages in several key areas. We acknowledge that such a repositioning must therefore be one which reviews in a holistic manner, the content and focus of our education and training systems, and places emphasis on areas including innovation and creativity; digital literacy and entrepreneurship; as well as issues of gender and inclusiveness.

Mr Vice President,

In this context, last year the CARICOM Heads of Government approved "The Strategic Plan for the Caribbean Community 2015-2019: Repositioning CARICOM" – the first ever Plan of its kind for our Community. It is an ambitious document, which lays out a comprehensive Plan for building economic, social and environmental resilience in the Community, as well as strengthening governance along with coordinated foreign policy, research and development, and innovation.

Needless to say, among the priorities identified is the need to build competitiveness and unleash key economic drivers to transition to growth and generate employment. This would be addressed across all areas of the Plan: economic, social, environmental and technological, and across all sectors of the economy, including the agricultural sector – a sector largely untapped in this regard.

Efforts will be made to advance human capital development, through the enhancement of key skills, education reform and youth development. We will build capacity and create green jobs in our efforts to manage adaptation to climate change and mitigate its effect, and enhance our resilience to natural disasters. And we will forge a culture of innovation, increase job creation, entrepreneurship and new business development in Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Last Month in Nassau, at our Inter-Sessional Meeting, we had a focussed discussion on how best we could leverage our human, cultural and natural assets for the development of the Region. We considered steps and actions to put in place the necessary enabling environment for our creative and cultural industries to thrive and increase their contribution to our overall development. We expanded our range of potential growth poles to include, for example, our sporting assets, in a bid to encourage new thinking in seeking to generate employment and create avenues for entrepreneurship. The areas identified have significant potential for enhancing and re-energising our tourism product in particular.

These are also areas that will be enhanced by the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), a field in which our young people are particularly adept. The idea therefore is to promote these sectors as viable for sustainable economic activity as well as an outlet for creativity and innovation among our youth. The establishment of a Single ICT Space in CARICOM will be the ideal platform to provide the

relevant opportunities. Apart from the employment factor, the beneficial effects will spill over into the social dimension, as the youngsters channel their ingenuity into productive activity.

Mr Vice President,

To do these things we will need the support of the international community. In this connection, CARICOM has been keen to align our Plan with that of the international agenda, and to ensure that the special needs of the Region, and SIDS in general, are central to the Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals.

We believe that with a renewed commitment to a global partnership for development, we would be able to provide the necessary support to Regional and national efforts to achieve the proposed Sustainable Development Goals, including the proposed goal 8, entitled "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all."

Indeed an important aspect of our thrust is the fact that the jobs created will be of such quality that is anticipated by the Decent Work Agenda. The Labour Movement in our Community enjoys the support of our governments and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as they seek, through the use of collective bargaining and social dialogue and the Decent Work Agenda, to support the promotion of quality jobs as an integral part

of promoting sustainable development in the Region. I look forward to my discussions later today with the ILO.

We in CARICOM also believe that the United Nations, this Council in particular, is uniquely placed to spearhead global efforts to assist Member States in achieving sustainable development, including through employment creation and decent work for all. We hope this Segment can bring about useful discussion and action in this regard.

I thank you.