

Revisiting the Georgetown Agreement

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"The truly compelling lesson of this journey is how critical it is to pool our resources: political, economic and intellectual in negotiating with countries beyond ourselves: globally, in Europe, in the Hemisphere."

Opening remarks by Sir Shridath Ramphal on the process of unification for the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States at the Inter-Regional High-Level Consultation in Barbados on 26 February 2019.

Mr Chairman -

Revisiting the Georgetown Agreement is a journey that takes us back all of fifty years; for its beginnings were nearer the start of the 70's than when we initialled parchment on the banks of the Demerara River in 1975. The early 70's were years that saw the Caribbean preparing earnestly to advance from CARIFTA to CARICOM at home, and beyond, to venture forth in new relations with a Europe inspired to change its future to one of unity, away from its history of schism. It is sobering that we should be reflecting on these expectant developments in the very week of BREXIT.

For developing countries generally it was a time characterised by freshness and creativity. Above all, it was a time of awareness among developing countries of the need for a wider unity. Countries of the 'third world' had found strength in their new spirit of oneness at the level of the G77, and confidence in their global pursuit of a new order - primarily a New International Economic Order. At the United Nations in New York, at UNCTAD in Geneva, in international gatherings around the world the theme of 'the South' was unity; and in the North-South dialogue that dominated the global scene developing countries, notably, gave intellectual leadership at diplomatic and technocratic levels. I will come back to that matter of 'intellectual leadership'.

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The Caribbean played an active part in these global efforts; and regionally it showed courage and resolve in moving its own integration efforts towards 'community', and using its new political independence in progressive ways - like the ending of the diplomatic embargo of Cuba through our joint act of recognition. In unity we found strength, and courage to use it in principled ways. Had you been in the west of our Region last Saturday — in Mara Lago more particularly — you might ask whether I am talking of the same Caribbean, the same Caribbean Community, the same countries that made the Caribbean a Community. The answer, ashamedly, is yes! But we were not always thus; and this a revisit of those earlier times which will return: Must return.

Nowhere was that earlier unity more manifest than in the negotiations with Europe for a new post-colonial trade and economic regime - the process which became known as the 'Lomé negotiations', taking its name from the Capital of Togo where it was signed. Caribbean countries played a leadership role - politically and professionally in those negotiations between the fledgling European Community of nine members and their erstwhile colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. So far as the Caribbean was concerned, and the same was true of African and Pacific countries who were members of the Commonwealth, they were negotiations effectively compelled by Britain's membership of the Community.

I was the Caribbean's spokesman in the negotiations; but, of course, our policy positions in the negotiations were shaped continuously by a regional Council of Ministers, some Foreign Ministers, most Trade Ministers. Jamaica's Trade Minister, P.J. Patterson — later to be Prime Minister — played a major role in leading for the whole Group in the negotiations on 'sugar' — a commodity of importance to many in the Group. I was pleased that on 12 February 2009 the European Commission honoured 'P.J.' and me by naming a special room in the Community's Headquarters after us for — as they inscribed: "'historic contribution to Caribbean-European co-operation". In essence, we first consolidated the Caribbean's unity, and then (with their help) moulded the diverse countries of Africa and the Pacific with us into the ACP — the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of countries. Caribbean unity made that wider unity possible; and it was that wider unity that made the conclusion of the

Convention achievable. In matters of trade, the Pacific Islands looked more to Australia and the Pacific Rim countries than to Europe, save for Fiji whose sugar exports to Britain were important to its economy. Prime Minister Ratu Mara of Fiji led generally for the Pacific. The 'P' in the ACP was never forgotten.

Now, let me go back in time. 1972 was the year of the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers Meeting in Guyana; but important as were the issues engaging the Meeting, I knew that ahead of us lay the negotiations with the European Union in which we would be interacting with African and Pacific countries. I knew that securing the maximum degree of unity possible with those countries was going to be essential. Perhaps, I thought, this was a good moment to begin the process of exploring the possibilities of unity. So, shortly before the Foreign Ministers met, I told my colleagues on the CARIFTA Council of Ministers the following:

"I intend to make use of the meeting of Non-aligned Foreign Ministers in Guyana to talk with all our colleagues from the Commonwealth about the EEC. I hope that we can involve all our colleagues from the Caribbean in those discussions. These are not formal discussions. They are not secret discussions. They are just talks to see if we can get other people to pool their resources with ours in relation to the negotiations that lie ahead."

It is good that our records have preserved this; for it marked the beginning of our first journey. The informal talks took place on the evening of 9 August 1972 and I have been reminded that as we did so in Georgetown we were almost equidistant from Africa to the East and the Pacific Islands to the West.

That discussion was the beginning of a process that led eventually to the pooling of the resources of all the relevant African, Caribbean and Pacific countries 'Associates' and 'Associables', 'French-speaking' and 'English-speaking', 'AASM' and 'Commonwealth Members' —(pooling) for the negotiations with the EEC that would end in the Lomé Convention.

The upshot of the ad-hoc Meeting was a warm reception for the idea of close collaboration between the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries taking part in the negotiations with Europe and agreement on how the interaction between us might begin. The Meeting decided that a team of Caribbean officials would visit Commonwealth African Capitals for more comprehensive technical discussions. That CARIFTA mission went in September 1972 to East and West Africa, holding talks in Arusha with officials of the East African Community and their counterparts in Lagos, Accra and Freetown — apprising their colleagues of the preparatory work already being undertaken in the Caribbean. What was clearly needed, however, was concerted action among African States, and at Lagos, Nigeria, in February 1973 a start was made in this direction with a meeting of Commonwealth African Ministers hosted by the Government of Nigeria. It was characterised by a bold and purposeful approach to the questions whether there should, indeed, be negotiations with the European Economic Community (EEC) as it then was and, if so, on what basis, and with what objectives.

At Lagos, it was agreed that a further meeting of Ministers should be convened in Nairobi to pursue these issues. Building on the international links forged earlier in 1972, the Lagos meeting authorised a team of Commonwealth African Ministers to visit Georgetown to hold discussions with Caribbean Ministers at CARIFTA Headquarters. This meeting, held on 19 March 1973 provided an opportunity for a comprehensive exchange of views on the approach to any negotiations with the EEC and on the essentials of any possible relationship. A refusal to be confined within the negotiating straight-jacket imposed unilaterally by the "options" in Protocol 22 to the Treaty Accession, and a determination to resist European overtures for a free trade area arrangement involving 'reciprocal preferences', emerged clearly and with unanimity from these discussions. Caribbean officials were invited to attend the 'African' Nairobi meeting as observers and did so in continuation of the inter-regional dialogue that was now fully established.

The Nairobi meeting allowed the Governments concerned to further elaborate and refine their approach to the negotiations and it prepared the ground for the next major step forward - namely, a deepening of the dialogue to encompass a political mandate for Africa as a whole to negotiate a unified relationship. Until these developments, the AASM States — the Francophone 'Associates' - were preparing for the re-negotiation of the Yaounde Convention (due to expire at the end of 1974) and there was a real danger of the perpetuation throughout the negotiations of the separateness — and, indeed, the potential conflict of interest - which the status of 'Associates' and 'Associables' tended to imply and develop.

A wider African unity as prerequisite

As these separate preparations unfolded it became clear that a wider African unity was the prerequisite to any effective negotiations with the EEC. This was accomplished at Abidjan, Ivory Coast in May 1973 at a Ministerial meeting convened under the auspices of the Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU). Out of that meeting came a united African approach to the negotiations - an approach founded on the 'eight principles' hammered out as the essential requirements of African States. More than once in these pioneering efforts at working together, Commonwealth and Francophone countries recognized the clear absurdity of preserving as if decolonization had never taken place — the biases, the suspicions, the sometimes wholly imaginary barriers to understanding that were the inheritance of colonialism itself. I believe that the Caribbean's partnering role assisted this mutual recognition. At Addis Ababa, these principles were endorsed by African Heads of State at the 10th Anniversary Summit Meeting of the OAU. They were to become the corner-stone of the negotiating structure erected by the ACP in Brussels.

All this had taken place against the background of not inconsiderable pressure from the EEC for the urgent commencement of negotiations and their being channelled into the pre-determined contours of Protocol 22 - contours that themselves tended to highlight distinctions between the 'Associates' and 'Associables'. As it transpired, these divisive 'options' under Protocol 22 (for inclusion in a revised Yaoundé Convention, for a separate Arusha-type Convention under Article 138 of the Treaty of Rome, or for a simple Trade Agreement with the Community) were never exercised by the 'Associables' despite Community mythology to the contrary. What eventually emerged at Lomé was the *sui generis* Agreement for which the ACP initially contended.

At Brussels, in July 1973, the first meeting took place between Ministers of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States and the Ministers of the Community. For the Europeans, it was the beginning of the negotiations; for the ACP it was 'talks about talks'. But whether it was the one or the other, a much more significant trend was discernible - a trend which the negotiations later confirmed and which had a decisive influence on their outcome. The European statement, relying heavily on generalisation, if not indeed ambiguity, bore all the marks of internal Community conflict. The ACP statement - three separate statements delivered by spokesmen of Africa ('Associates' and 'Associables' making a single speech) the Caribbean, and the Pacific - revealed clearly perceived objectives and bore all the marks of internal coordination and consistency.

From that time onward there was no turning back to separateness. At the next joint ACP/EEC Ministerial meeting in Brussels in October 1973, the ACP case presented by three voices in July was now urged by one voice - that of the then current Chairman of the African Group. This was in response to a specific Caribbean offer that the demonstrated unity of the ACP Group be symbolised and formalised by such a single presentation. Thereafter, throughout the discussions, extending over a year, the ACP never negotiated otherwise than as a Group and spoke always with one voice. It was often an African voice, sometimes a Caribbean or a Pacific voice; but always a voice that spoke for the ACP.

In the first Statement I made on behalf of the Caribbean at the opening of what we called the 'ACP- EEC Conference' on 28 July 1973, I made a point that was to permeate the subsequent negotiations and bears repeating here. I said:

"As regards trading arrangements with the Community, we do not consider it to be appropriate that the negotiations should proceed on the concept of a free trade relationship; and we reject entirely the notion that the price of duty free entry into the Community for the main products of developing States with whom the arrangements are concluded should be the reciprocation of trade benefits. Reciprocity between those who are unequal in economic strength is a contradiction in economic terms. In contemporary economic relations, Aristotle's dictum that 'justice requires equality between equals but proportionality between unequals' must surely mean that as between those who are unequal in economic, strength, equity itself demands non-reciprocity. We are, therefore, strongly opposed to the incorporation in the new arrangements of anything on the lines of article 3, paragraph 1, of the Yaoundé Convention".

The reference to Aristotle was a contribution of Barbados' Foreign Minister, Cameron Tudor, a Greek scholar who had been President of the Oxford Union — and not otherwise deeply involved in the preparatory discussions. It was a master-stroke. It virtually ended argument with the bemused Europeans; and the Lomé Convention did not require reciprocity. The Convention which was to govern trade and economic relations with the evolving Europe for two decades, and dictate the fundamentals of ACP-EU relations for two more, has now been replaced by Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the European Union and the several parts and sub-parts of the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. At the heart of EPAs is 'reciprocity'. Ironically, it is the Caribbean countries who were the first to accept the new EPA dispensation in 2008 by each of them individually signing the Agreement with the 27-nation European Union collectively.

The sustained unity of the ACP in the Lomé negotiations naturally called for immense preparatory work. In large measure, this was done by the ACP Ambassadors in Brussels, meeting in regular session. Their monumental efforts prepared the ground for Ministerial Meetings held successively in Dar-es-Salaam, Dakar, Kingston and Accra at which ACP positions and approaches were discussed and settled. The meeting in Kingston, Jamaica in 1974 represented a high point in ACP solidarity. Up to then, meetings with the EEC Ministers had all taken place in Brussels. It was important to the ACP that this pattern of movement to Europe be broken and, in July 1974, the next joint ACP/EEC Ministerial Meeting convened in the Caribbean. ACP unity was both manifest and insistent and negotiations moved forward appreciably, but with discernible signs of mounting Community resistance to some of the more 'sensitive' demands of the ACP such as those on 'rules of origin', or the character of 'm.f.n. treatment', or access for products covered by the Community's 'Common Agricultural Policy'.

Meanwhile, the ACP had been developing its machinery of unity. I have referred already to the Committee of Ambassadors in Brussels and the Meetings of ACP Ministers. Underpinning all these was the ad-hoc Secretariat of the ACP Group headed by an Executive Secretary, supported by staff permanently based in Brussels and supplemented by a continuous flow of ACP technicians working closely with it. Nothing did more to forge the ACP into a disciplined united working group at all levels than this regime of joint effort directed toward concerted goals.

I earlier emphasised the word 'intellectual'. I do so again because it was that quality of the ACP's work in the negotiations that won respect. P.J. Patterson and I may have been mentioned in the inscription on the walls of EU Headquarters; but many others could have been — like Alister McIntyre. At the launch of Sir Alister's book at the end of 2016 *The Caribbean and the Wider World* — which I commend to you as an aid to analysis of the Lomé Negotiations — PJ himself said this, speaking of Sir Alister:

"The sheer brilliance of the presentation he made left the Europeans stunned in appreciation, and made the work of the negotiating team that much easier- "

On your journey, too, I commend P.J. Patterson's astute analysis of the negotiations in his recent book *My Political Journey*. With my own account of building the ACP in *Glimpses of a Global Life*, you have a trilogy of reminiscences — albeit from a Caribbean platform. The point I stress is that negotiating at this level, and in these technical contexts, requires much more than the ordinary; it demands intellectual lustre.

In the end, at the final negotiating session in Brussels, the Ministerial spokesmen of the ACP on whom rested the responsibility of negotiating with European Ministers on behalf of the entire Group, came from such varied backgrounds as Gabon (Financial and Technical Cooperation), Mauritania (Institutions, Establishments, etc.), Guyana (the Trade Regime), Fiji and Jamaica (Sugar) and Senegal (Coordinating ACP Chairman). Guyana's responsibility for 'the Trade Regime' meant that I was the central negotiator.

The unity of interests of the ACP became more manifest as the negotiations lengthened (and, as was dramatically revealed in

the ultimate stages when, rum, a product of interest to only one region, the Caribbean) threatened to frustrate the eventual consensus. Neither regional nor linguistic affinities, neither separate national interests nor past associations, neither personalities nor cultural patterns, were allowed to supersede the interest of the Group as a whole. Rum was a Caribbean product. Africa - Francophone and Anglophone - was willing to forego its hard won gains in the negotiations if the Caribbean's needs on rum were not met. They made that clear to Europe. Europe listened. Caribbean needs were met. For me, that was the finest moment in the negotiations; for it was a moment of solidarity that had truly begun on the in Georgetown two years before.

The Lomé Convention was not perfect; it did not meet all the aspirations of the ACP as a significant segment of the developing world. At the signing of the Convention in Lomé on 28 February 1975, I said so:

"It is essential that we do strive to ensure that this Convention in the fulfilment of its potential — and it is in its potential rather than in its text that its great value lies — is true to the ideals of cooperation which it proclaims. It would be an essay in self-deception for us to believe that the document we sign today fulfils all those ideals of co-operation and it would be a dangerous pretence for us to imply that it does...- These unfulfilled expectations that occasion disappointment like greater access for agricultural products, like greater liberalism in the application, if not the construction of the Rules of Origin, like wider horizons for the Stabilization fund, like greater realism in the levels of development assistance — all these are matters for which the Convention provides potential for adjustment and towards these ends we must work".

Nonetheless, the Convention was a point of departure in the relations between developing and developed States. The negotiations were then — and probably remain the most effective negotiations on a package of comprehensive economic arrangements ever conducted by developing countries with any major sector of the developed world. That it was such an innovation and represented such a promise derived in the main from the process of unification described above - a process that brought together what were then 46 developing States in a uniquely effective manner to meet the challenge of negotiating with the European Economic Community - a significant segment of the developed world that had itself so rightly turned to integration in answer to the challenge of survival. The Lomé Convention was to last for 20 years renewed three times with improvement.

I took satisfaction (not, admittedly unbridled) in the conclusion of the Convention; but I took more (and with less qualification) in the evolution of the ACP. I had never concealed the priority we placed on ACP 'oneness'. At the penultimate ACP Ministerial meeting in Dakar, Senegal, on 19th December 1974 I ended my contribution with these words:

'Finally, Mr Chairman, let me place on record without ambiguity that in looking at the value of the arrangements in their entirety, we in the Caribbean place high the cohesion among the ACP States which these negotiations have produced and which any agreement with Europe must endeavour to sustain — and which our failure to agree on an Agreement with Europe will destroy. For this reason we feel that the time has come for us formally to propose — as we have previously indicated — that the ACP Group of States be institutionalised not merely as ad hoc machinery of coordination for the purposes of the negotiations, but as an ongoing mechanism of unity between our States. We urge that this Meeting formally mandate our Ambassadors to examine the paper already prepared by the Secretariat and put forward to us proposals to that end — proposals that need not exclude institutionalising the ACP within the framework of the Agreement itself.

Yet, I felt that my work was not complete. As the negotiations proceeded and the ambition for unity grew, I had begun to see the ACP as a group whose genesis was in the negotiations with Europe but which had to have an existence outside of those relations — the largest inter-continental group of developing countries working in functional unity. To consummate this ambition I invited the Ministers of the ACP, who had bonded through the negotiations, to meet in Georgetown to formally establish the ACP in its own right. In June 1975 - at what was to be my last Conference as Foreign Minister (as it turned out, as any Minister) - the ACP Ministers signed the 'Georgetown Agreement' establishing the ACP in its own right with objectives beyond the implementation of the Lomé Convention.

methodology of unified bargaining

The truly compelling lesson of this journey is how critical it is to pool our resources: political, economic and intellectual in negotiating with countries beyond ourselves: globally, in Europe, in the Hemisphere. As regards the Lomé negotiations, the process of unification - for such it was - added a new dimension to the Third World's quest for economic justice through international action. Its significance, however, derives not mainly from the terms of the negotiated relationship between the 46 ACP States and the EEC, but rather from the methodology of unified bargaining which the negotiations pioneered. Never before had so large a segment of the developing world negotiated with so powerful a grouping of developed countries so comprehensive and so innovative a regime of economic relations. It was a new, and salutary, experience for Europe; it was a new, and reassuring, experience for the ACP States. In revisiting the Georgetown Agreement, this primacy of institutionalised unity is the lesson I most urge upon you. And upon you who are of this region — the lesson that perhaps none of this could have happened at all, without the beginnings of regional unity here in the Caribbean — and our obligation to return to it.

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