

**Inaugural Statement by
Sir Ronald Sanders KCMG KCN AM
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda
at a Meeting of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American
States
Friday 14th August 2015**

Mr President, Secretary General, distinguished colleagues.

I thank you all for the welcome I have received to the Councils of the OAS.

We all know that this is a dynamic and trying time in the history of the Organisation.

Its cohesion is being tested by differences between some of its member states on a number of issues.

Its relevance is being questioned by influential groups within our societies.

Yet, the conviction that led our founding fathers to create this partnership between our countries sixty-seven years ago in Bogotá remains as pertinent today as it was then.

We all recall that the founding fathers declared that they were ‘persuaded that the welfare (of our peoples) and their contribution to the progress and the civilization of the world will increasingly require intensive continental cooperation’.

As I said last Monday when I presented my credentials to the Secretary-General, there has never been a time in mankind’s history when our planet has been faced with common challenges of greater magnitude than now.

Climate Change poses an existential threat to many Caribbean states and equally menaces countries with low-lying coastal areas, including ones in Latin and Central America.

Terrorism both within and across borders holds the world hostage to fanaticism costing lives and consuming resources that could otherwise be invested in sustainable development worldwide.

Communicable diseases, drug trafficking and organised crime respect no borders.

Across the world, unemployment among the young is high as is the level of their disenchantment.

Inequality within states and between them is growing every day, producing refugees and human misery on a shameful scale that ought not to be a condition of a 21st Century civilization.

The OAS can contribute to the solution of these problems in collaboration and cooperation with other multilateral and international organisations.

For it to do so, every member state must commit to strengthening the Organisation to play its fullest role in our Hemisphere and in the wider global community.

As Pope Francis has observed, “we need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family. There are no frontiers or barriers – political or social – behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalization of indifference”.

This is a time for an engaged OAS, not an indifferent one.

This is a time for a cohesive OAS, not a fragmented one.

This is a time to make the OAS relevant not only for the benefit of its own peoples, but for the peoples of the world community.

Mr President, this is no idle thought or unachievable ambition.

The Gross Domestic Product of the 34 active member states of this Organisation is \$28.35 trillion.

That is \$9.8 trillion more than the 28 countries of the European Union.

It is more than a quarter of the entire world’s GDP at 26.41%.

The member states of this Organisation have the capacity, acting together, to influence the world for good, if they can marshal their resources behind policies upon which agreement can be moulded on an anvil of practical discussion.

And, I would remind us all that a basic principle, enshrined in the Charter of this Organisation, is that: “Economic cooperation is essential to the common welfare and prosperity of the peoples of the continent”.

Mr President, my country is small and our resources tiny, but within our capacity, we are pledged to contribute to the continued vitality and performance of this Organisation, and we urge all our partner countries to do so in the interest of the people in whose name we serve.

There should be no drift away from the purposes and principles on which the Organisation was founded and which have sustained it since it was formally created, sixty-seven years ago.

One of those important purposes is:

“To prevent possible causes of difficulties and to ensure the pacific settlement of disputes that may arise among the Member States”.

Our region of the world does not serve its own interests by conflict.

The founding fathers of this organisation knew that truth to be self-evident.

That is why they enshrined it in the Charter.

My country recognises that our people can only thrive and prosper within this hemisphere in a climate free of conflict and contention.

In this regard, we look forward to playing a constructive role, within this Organisation, in the peaceful settlement of conflicts and in maintaining adherence to international law.

Mr President, we also look forward to the universality of hemispheric representation in this body by the return of Cuba to our councils.

I am proud that, apart from Canada and Mexico, the countries of the Caribbean were the first to end the isolation of Cuba in this Hemisphere in 1972.

And while it took 42 years since then “to cut loose the anchor of failed policies of the past”, today, Cuba enjoys diplomatic relations with every member state of this Organisation.

Cuba must not now isolate itself from this body of which it is a founding member.

My government calls on the Cuban government to take its rightful seat in the Council of the OAS.

We pledge to do all in our power to encourage Cuba to do so.

Mr President, I am aware that this Organisation is grappling with diverse perceptions among some of its member states about what should be the priorities of its work.

This is not unusual in any association made up of members that are at different stages of progress.

In other multilateral organisations a debate rages with as much intensity as in this one over whether “democracy” should take priority over “development”.

But, in many ways, it is a sterile debate.

Democracy and development are inter-twined and the success of one is dependent on the sustainability of the other.

Neither is possible unless both are advanced on a dual track, and both will be halted if one is sacrificed for the other.

Mr President, I am privileged to be a member of the “Friends of the Democratic Charter”, under the Chairmanship of former US President Jimmy Carter.

We have all heard the disturbing news that this great champion of democracy, justice and equity has announced that he has been diagnosed with cancer.

I use this opportunity to call on this Permanent Council to send a message to President Carter expressing our deep concern and extending our best wishes.

Colleagues, as a Member of the “Friends of the Democratic Charter”, I have followed closely the efforts to uphold the values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in all our member states.

These values are important to Antigua and Barbuda since we have emerged from a history of colonialism, oppression and exploitation.

We will work to preserve and uphold them in the interest of all peoples.

However, economic development, social improvement particularly eliminating poverty and creating employment are also crucial to us, and we will strive equally diligently for the OAS to maintain and enhance its role in these matters.

As one of the smallest member states of this Organisation, and notwithstanding that the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has projected that for 2015 Antigua and Barbuda will have the highest growth rate of all Caribbean countries at 5.3%, my government welcomes the priority being given by the Secretary-General to mitigation of natural disasters, facilitation of foreign investment and wealth distribution, and inter-connectivity in transport and information technology.

In all this, our member states should focus on the areas of our agreement and accord, bringing to bear our collective resources to improve the economic and social wellbeing of all our countries and the safety and security of all our peoples.

And, we must give to our Secretary General, as our Chief Executive Officer, the necessary tools and support to carry out the task for which we elected him.

He deserves no less.

Mr President, my colleague Permanent Representatives, Secretary-General and colleagues, I am delighted to join you in our quest to deliver the benefits that all our peoples rightly expect from our partnership in this great institution – the OAS.

Thank you.