

**BUILDING THE INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR CLOSER  
COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION BETWEEN AFRICA, THE  
CARIBBEAN, AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA:  
THE ABCD COMMISSION**

**BY**

**DR. THE HON. RALPH GONSALVES  
PRIME MINISTER OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

- **Address delivered at the First Africa-CARICOM Summit of  
Heads of Heads of State and Government held  
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**Office of the Prime Minister  
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Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines**

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**NOTE:**

This Statement of Prime Minister Ralph E. Gonsalves was circulated at the First-Africa-CARICOM Summit on August 7, 2021. Due to time constraints at the Summit, the Prime Minister spoke extemporaneously on the central issues at hand instead of delivering the prepared Statement.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Comrades all:

This AFRICA-CARICOM SUMMIT is an historic first. Its compelling theme: “**Unity Across Continents and Oceans: Opportunities for Deepening Integration**” manifests, and represents, a great cause. And great causes have never been won by doubtful men and women. Urgency of creative thought and action is required of all of us, singly and jointly. Let us not, therefore, contribute to any desecration of our collective future by tarrying or delaying much longer in the philosophical and practical embrace of a deeper, more efficacious nexus between our Africa, our Caribbean, our Diaspora in the interest of our people’s humanisation and sustainable development.

Comrade Chairman, the history of our respective peoples pre-disposes us to a deepening bond with each other. Much of this has been tellingly summarized by previous speakers; and I echo and adopt all of these commentaries and call them my own. Beyond the shared historical experiences, the realities of the global and our regional political economy induce our respective peoples in Africa, the Caribbean, and the African Diaspora to work closer with each other in our own strategic interests. Challenges and opportunities abound.

### **SHARED EXPERIENCES**

Our enduring tapestry of shared experiences of pain and joy, successes and failures, triumphs and defeats combined with the possibilities and limitations, strengths and weaknesses of our people's contemporary life, living production, and complex circumstances, have conspired to conjoin us irrevocably, now and for the future. Our respective countries' and regions' location in the global political economy has catapulted us to an historic juncture of significance in human affairs globally.

### **AFRICA-CARICOM COMMISSION AND ABCD COMMISSION**

To effect the mandates and requisite work programme of more perfectly uniting Africa, the Caribbean, other countries washed by the Caribbean sea in which there

are significant numbers of people of African descent, Brazil with one-half of its 220 million persons being of African descent, and the Diaspora, comprising of persons of African descent in North America, Europe, and elsewhere, it is necessary and desirable to establish a permanent Africa, Brazil, Caribbean, Diaspora Commission — the ABCD Commission. Essential to this comprehensive consummation of history, ancestry, culture, geography, and global connectedness, in our collective interest, is the vital staging post of the setting up, as a matter of urgency, as a pre-requisite, a permanent Africa-CARICOM Commission. The less ambitious may settle for this transitional staging post, in the short-to-medium-term, but I strongly advise the pursuance of the larger goal of an ABCD Commission, fulfilling, in the age of modern globalisation, the early-20<sup>th</sup> century vision of the Right Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey, National Hero of Jamaica, who advocated the unity of Africans at home and abroad in an era of colonial and imperial over-rule, prior to the epoch of the establishment of modern independent states in Africa and the Caribbean.

CARICOM accepted the exploration of the idea of the ABCD Commission in July 2019. African countries have already explicitly embraced this concept. And the Concept Note in preparation for this Summit has expressed the intention “*to support the formation of the Africa-Brazil-CARICOM (ABCD) Commission.*”

Every idea has its historic moment and place. Most, if not all, of us gathered here today consider that the ABCD Commission moment has now come for Africa,

Brazil, the Caribbean, and the Diaspora generally. But, today, as the leaders of Africa and CARICOM we can certainly speak authoritatively, and with one voice, for the creation of a permanent AFRICA-CARIBBEAN COMMISSION — the ACC.

The ABCD Commission will encompass nearly two billion people, 79 independent states, and a huge Diaspora: Fifty-four (54) member-states of the African Union, with their abundant resources and 1.4 billion people; Brazil, the ninth largest economy in the world with 220 million persons, of whom 110 million are of African descent, the largest such grouping in any state outside of the African continent; the 24 countries of the Association of the Caribbean States (ACS) which are washed by the Caribbean Sea; among these states under the ACS umbrella are the 15-member Caribbean Community (CARICOM), a towering institution construct nearly 50 years old; the ACS includes all the nations of the Caribbean area and resource-laden countries such as Cuba, Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela — the ACS contains a population of some 250 million; and the rest of the African diaspora numbering at least 70 million, nestled significantly in North America, Europe and elsewhere.

The ABCD Commission or the transitional Africa-CARICOM Commission places the fractured global might of peoples of African descent within a single institutional framework. Within that unity is undeniable and untapped strength to be utilised within the interest of our people's humanisation. This is a concrete proposal for further upliftment and realization of the goals and targets of the

United Nation's Decade for People of Africa Descent. Africa's centrality is a core feature of CARICOM's public policy. In this regard, Africa and CARICOM in communion with our Diaspora must take an emphatic lead in seeking reparations for Native Genocide and the Enslavement of Africans so horrendously driven by European nations.

### **AGENDA FOR AFRICA, CARIBBEAN, DIASPORA**

The comprehensive and meaningful agenda for the ABCD Commission or for the immediate Africa-CARICOM Commission is elaborated in the "Anticipated Outcomes of this Summit" as particularised in the "Concept Note" inclusive of the Declaration of the first Africa-CARICOM Summit, the Commitments of the Heads of State and Government, and the Institutionalisation of the Cooperation between the African Union and CARICOM. The distinguished Chairman of this Summit, my dear brother Uhuru Kenyatta, the President of Kenya, and CARICOM's Chairman, my friend and Comrade Gaston Browne of Antigua and Barbuda, have provided us, broadly, with our line of march in their Opening Statements.

Already, we have witnessed the fruits of African-CARICOM cooperation in many areas, including recently on matters which touch and concern vaccines to fight COVID-19. At the United Nations Security Council, the A3 plus One (the three non-permanent members of the UNSC from Africa plus St. Vincent and the Grenadines) has been extremely effective, over the past 18 months or so, in

advancing the peace, security, and development interests of Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

There have also been vital bilateral agreements between individual states of the African Union and of CARICOM, including St. Vincent and the Grenadines, on a range of matters including political cooperation and diplomacy, investment, energy, trade, visa waivers, education, health, agriculture, sports and culture.

One final matter: Cuba, that selfless, heroic nation of our Caribbean which is currently severely challenged by imperialism's illegal economic blockade and the feverish ravages of COVID-19 require our urgent and practical solidarity. Our duty demands action in this regard, inclusive of a commitment of tangible solidarity by all of us.

In closing, let me say that I have been advised that I am the only Head of Government outside of Africa who ever attended an African university. I am proud to have studied and researched at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, in pursuance of my doctoral degree. My personal friendship with African leaders, past and present, means a lot to me. Whenever I go to Africa, I am mesmerized by its beauty, its majesty, its achievements, and its enormous potential, despite all its challenges and pain. Above all, the people of Africa are a collective tribute to humanity and a central pillar for humanity's future. Together the African and Caribbean civilisations, in their unity and diversity, are a formidable fulcrum for

humanity's advance and the avoidance of the desecration of our future. Of all time, only the future that can be compromised and sullied; and we commit not to do so. Africa and the Caribbean, in unity, would work wonders for us and the world. Our mission is clear! Our duty is unavoidable. Let's get on with it!

Thank you!