
Barbados' relations with Cuba firmly rooted

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BARBADOS-CUBA RELATIONS are firmly rooted in the message delivered by this country's first Prime Minister, and now National Hero, The Rt. Excellent Errol Walton Barrow, to the United Nations General Assembly on the occasion of Barbados' formal admission to that international community of sovereigns.

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Senator Maxine McClean, reminded many Barbadians, Cubans and others of this on Tuesday, as she addressed the start of a panel discussion to mark CARICOM-Cuba Day, December 8, at the National Union of Public Workers' headquarters, Dalkeith Road, St. Michael.

She recalled: "In that inaugural address, the Prime Minister articulated his vision for an Independent Barbados, and his strategy for achieving it. In the manner to which pre-independent Barbados had become accustomed, Prime Minister Barrow encapsulated his discourse in what is the most famous, and well-known description of Barbados: Friends to all; satellites of none.

Giving a snapshot of our early recognition of Cuba, Senator McClean noted that by the late 1960s, Barbados' economy was heavily dependent on trade with Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, and these trading partners might have been surprised that Barbados did not recoil from establishing diplomatic relations, with Cuba in 1972.

"Forty-three years ago, US-Cuba relations were strained, and the Bay of Pigs episode cemented views that Cuba should be ex-communicated from the international community. For those foreign representatives who were present when our first Prime Minister delivered his inaugural address to the United Nations, Barbados' decision ought not to have come as a surprise," she declared.

It was also noted that the establishment of Barbados-Cuba diplomatic relations came at a time when we had in place the requisite laws to build an international business and financial services sector. And, Minister McClean explained that Barbados turned its exercise of small state diplomacy to the negotiation of bilateral agreements to

improve its attractiveness for foreign investors interested in using the country's infrastructure, legal, regulatory, tax and human resources.

She also stated that both countries also enjoyed reciprocal treaty relations in the areas of tax and investment for almost as long as they had enjoyed diplomatic relations.

Commending Cuba for assistance given not only to this island, Senator McClean said of particular note was the longstanding support provided in the area of natural disaster prevention, response and mitigation, most recently evidenced by President Raul Castro's immediate response to the flooding in Dominica.

"Indeed, this response was not a knee-jerk reaction to extreme weather conditions but was born out of a settled agenda of supporting the members of the Caribbean Community in the area of disaster response," she asserted.

Meanwhile, Ambassador of Cuba to Barbados, Francisco Peña, assured Government of his intent to continue cultivating the relations. Stating that the two countries had signed several agreements in agriculture, health, culture and sports, as well as a very important agreement for the promotion and protection of investment, he said: "We have to thank Barbados' Governments for their standing positions on topics/issues of our national priority, like the policy of isolation of our Revolution during the years and our struggle for lifting the US blockade against Cuba."

Noting that his country wanted to do more for the region, Peña said there was a sports contract in place here that was about to be extended and upgraded with other disciplines, and Cuba was about to accept an initiative from the National Sports Council to improve their cricket team.

He further added that the cultural agreement would be enhanced in relation to heritage and restoration, and that several high level officials in culture, tourism and education, from Barbados, could be expected in Cuba throughout 2016.
