

## Address Given by the Honourable Billie A. Miller, M.P., Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade

Mr Emmanuel Arinze, President, Commonwealth Association of Museums, Ms Alissandra Cummins, Vice President, Commonwealth Association of Museums, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

I bid you all a good morning.

I must extend my appreciation to the Commonwealth Association of Museums for inviting me to address you on the occasion of your 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. I am pleased that the members of the Organisation have chosen to mark that event here in Barbados and I wish to offer you my congratulations.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have been asked to speak on the theme: “Museums, Peace, Democracy and Governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” I believe that I can best do so by giving you some insights into our experiences as a Nation and a Government. The Government of Barbados is committed to the preservation and promotion of all aspects of our rich cultural heritage. We consider this a clear responsibility to the people of this country.

In outlining the Government’s vision for Barbados in the new millennium, Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Owen Arthur stressed that: “No country can ever truly develop unless it finds a means of engrossing everyone in the task of nation building, whatever their class, creed, colour or political persuasion.” In seeking to give effect to that vision we are convinced that we must find within ourselves the maturity to evaluate and come to terms with our past, however horrific and painful some elements of that may be. The resilient character of our society is forged from adversity.

With an open mind we can all learn to recognise the importance of the journey we have made and the struggles we have overcome. The role of the Museum, in providing a context through which to view our society’s development is therefore pivotal.

Museums have the potential to be a powerful force in the education of a people. In a technology-driven, fast-paced world, the Museum provides a quiet space for reflection on all those elements which have contributed to the evolution of a Nation. For it documents not only the horrors and injustices of the past, but also highlights the ingenuity and creativity of the human spirit. The Museum’s capacity for communicating is not restricted to the domestic level. Visitors to a country, whether tourists or business travellers, generally include a visit to the local museum in their schedule.

And it is instructive that in the case of armed conflict the Museum is often a prime target of the attacking forces, while conversely the citizens of the invaded country expend great effort

Museums, Peace, Democracy and Governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Commonwealth Association of Museums’ Triennial Conference, Barbados, May 5-12, 1999

to secure and safeguard their cultural heritage. Unfortunately, it is also true that in many of our countries, and this is certainly the case of the Caribbean, there is still a need for us to encourage our people to view their own Museum as relevant, accessible and welcoming. It is not there to tell quaint stories of “native” life to foreigners, but rather it is there as a catalyst to help us interpret our own living history in a dynamic way.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Government of Barbados adheres to the principles and practices of parliamentary democracy and good governance in accordance with the history and culture of our nation. Social responsibility is at all times central to our policies and decisions. We know that a cohesive multi-ethnic society does not emerge spontaneously.

Governments therefore have a responsibility to use the powerful tools of education and cultural awareness to build into their system and style of governance mechanisms to help the nation to evaluate and apply the lessons learnt from years of interaction and interdependence. They have a duty to create an environment in which the distinctive and diverse character of their societies can be a positive force for harmony.

This is a dynamic process. There is a tendency, natural some may say, to view the differences with mistrust and fear. In Barbados we cannot afford that luxury. We feel that we have to live and work harmoniously if we are to achieve success as a nation and as individual groups within the nation. We recognise that in the Commonwealth we still have areas of conflict between member states and internally in some countries.

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, of which I am a member, works with the Governments involved to seek solutions and from time to time we meet a measure of success, as in the recent case of Nigeria. Our Government feels, however, that in the Commonwealth we have not yet fully utilised the positive qualities of our differences. We must not only examine differences when there is a conflict. We believe that there is a wealth of potential for us as a group, but we must first recognise the value of our rich diversity.

From that very diversity we can forge a special model through which to demonstrate that understanding, trust and constant dialogue can indeed contribute to peace building.

We must share our experiences with countries or organisations outside our body as our contribution to the important worldwide peace-building effort.

Ladies and gentlemen, there has never been a better time to consider the question of global peace than the present. As we approach the end of the twentieth century, and even as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is marking its fiftieth anniversary, a series of military actions are underway across a number of countries. It is worthy of note that at the root of many conflicts there are the very basic elements of misunderstanding and distrust. When some of the other human failings such as greed, envy and power are introduced peace is

threatened and it becomes clear that diplomacy has not yet been made obsolete by technology. Indeed, diplomacy is needed now more than ever.

We must use technology positively as part of our diplomatic effort so that it is needed less for military purposes from which there are invariably devastating humanitarian consequences.

In the global economy small vulnerable states are not threatened by large wars but they must confront increasingly larger trading blocs for the purpose of extracting the greatest benefit from the new international trade arrangements. A clear recognition of the social and political implications of their actions does not always appear to be a priority, nor indeed obvious. On the other hand, it has become common for the industrialised states to seek the inclusion of references to democracy and good governance in economic and trade arrangements.

The Government of Barbados is concerned that in presenting proposals for conditionalities these countries do not present a clear definition of terms such as good governance. We are also greatly concerned about those conditionalities which go to policy formation.

We can seek to be guided by international conventions on human rights to determine certain common denominators of good governance but we cannot accept the notion that one group of countries has the right to prescribe for others what constitutes good governance, and to make it an essential element which conditions their co-operation in an agreement of partnership. Good governance does not evolve in a vacuum. It cannot be a case of one size fits all. We must therefore be conscious of and sensitive to the cultural and social background against which governance takes place before we can presume to evaluate its relative worth.

Museums reinforce the social and cultural strengths of a society, and give us a context in which to view our own development. They also help us to appreciate the development of other societies and cultures serving as fundamental change agents in the process of building global peace and understanding.

By helping to define, preserve and promote basic human values, the Commonwealth Association of Museums will be one of our most important vehicles for defining the future.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that you are satisfied with the progress of your discussions and I am confident that the Commonwealth family of nations will be well served by the outcome. Please enjoy our Barbados as it is today.

Thank you.