

**FEATURE ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
FOREIGN TRADE AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS, HON.  
CHRISTOPHER SINCKLER M.P., AT THE AWARDS CEREMONY,  
BANQUET AND MASQUERADE BALL OF THE BARBADOS  
COLLABORATIVE CONFERENCE 2008 ON AUGUST 09, 2008 AT  
THE HILTON BARBADOS**

Master of Ceremonies,

Chairman of the National Association of Barbados Organizations in the United States of America (NABO), Mr. Earl Ashby

Vice President of the National Council of Barbadian Associations in the United Kingdom (NCBA - UK), Mrs. Hilly Padmore

Past President of the National Council of Barbadian Associations in Canada Inc. (NCBAC), Mrs. Jessica Carrington

Members of the Executive of Barbadian Organizations and Associations Abroad

Members of Organizations of Returning Nationals in Barbados

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour for me to address you on the occasion of this gala event, the Awards Ceremony, Banquet and Masquerade Ball of the Barbados Collaborative Conference 2008. I am particularly thrilled that the three umbrella organizations in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada have pooled their talents, skills and expertise towards the objective of securing the development of Barbados.

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the awardees on their recognition here this evening. A glance at these individuals and their achievements indicates the wealth of experience and aptitudes which they utilize daily to the benefit of their adopted countries and Barbados.

Last Sunday, we worshipped together at the Abundant Life Assembly, setting the tone for the week's activities by giving thanks to the Almighty for his blessings and seeking his guidance for a successful meeting.

As Minister responsible for diaspora matters, let me state that this Conference comes at a critical juncture in the development of our country. Upon coming into office in January, our new administration immediately set to work developing and implementing an economic strategy and programme based on our electoral commitments. The high cost of living, associated issues of food security, our land use policy, health care, housing, transportation and governance were and remain among the priorities for attention. The massive increases in the price of oil brought into sharper focus longstanding issues such as regional food production, transportation in relation to products from the region, the external tariffs applicable to food imported and the need for a more multidisciplinary approach to addressing the cost of living.

We remain resolute in addressing these challenges and in implementing corrective measures which, while they may be challenging, will be in the best long-term interests of the country. While we have introduced tough measures, we have also sought to provide relief to the most vulnerable.

My fellow Barbadians and friends of Barbados, against this background, it is vital that small, developing countries such as ours realize their fullest possible potential by utilizing the total intellectual and creative capacity of their people in order to secure steady, sustainable development. One example of the use of this capacity is the formulation by the Barbadian National Organizations in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada of “Disaster Response Guidelines” intended as a model to inform their response to a disaster affecting Barbados or other members of CARICOM. Based on technical advice provided by the PanAmerican Health Organization (PAHO), through the Embassy in Washington DC, they reflect international best practices in responding to disasters. This is a commendable achievement.

Yesterday afternoon, members of the executive of the three umbrella organizations were able to engage with Government Ministries and Agencies in a Roundtable Discussion on ways in which the two sides could cooperate for their mutual benefit.

My Government recognizes the role played by nationals overseas in the advancement of our country’s interests. Consequently, we have decided to revisit the regime governing Barbadians resident overseas and those returning home to resettle. In this regard, the Prime Minister, in his Budget Speech on July 07, announced a series of attractive new initiatives geared at improving conditions for these individuals and revealed that the following measures would be taken as part of Government’s commitment to enhancing the environment for these individuals:

1. Establish a Unit for Overseas Barbadians called Barbados NetWork;
2. Review the incentives given with a view to enhancing them and removing some unnecessary restrictions including those relating to the condition of returning to Barbados;
3. Create a Bond to encourage the investment of foreign exchange by Barbados NetWorkers;
4. Develop a comprehensive Barbados NetWorkers Data Bank;
5. Host a biennial Barbados NetWork Consultation starting next year following on the current Collaborative Conference

These measures should go a long way toward reinvigorating the programmes established to facilitate the resettlement of Barbadians and also to ensure that those of you who remain abroad may be certain that you are an integral pillar in our country's social, economic and political structure.

I now turn to a subject which I am sure many of you may have considered and which could present some challenges. How do you first-generation Barbadians exert enough influence on your offspring, who are products of metropolitan countries with their own peculiar attractions, to remain loyal and committed to Barbados? Those of you present see Barbados as home and many of you yearn to return at some point. But the reality may be different for your children.

Yesterday, I met with a delegation from the Young Barbadian Professional Society (Canada), a group launched this year to harness the potential of young Canadians of Barbadian heritage specifically to contribute to the

economic and social progress of Barbados. This organization has attracted over 130 young professionals. This is a laudable move which must be encouraged and promoted. I urge you to assist groups such as this in their formative stages of development. You must cooperate with them as they forge linkages with similar groups in North America, the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

Furthermore, within your organizations, you must embrace the youth, encouraging them to play an active part in your activities and assigning them key roles. While it may be said that the youth at times have a different focus, if we examine other diaspora groups in the various cities where you reside, we will observe clear examples of young and old standing together to secure the advancement of their country of origin.

As this Conference draws to a close, I wish to commend those of you who took the vision of hosting such an event and turned it into reality, building stronger ties with your colleagues in other countries and with your fellow Barbadians at home in the process. You may rest assured that the Government will support you in your efforts to continue strengthening the links between the diaspora and the homeland.

I thank you.