

## **Canada-Caribbean Ideas Forum: A Message from the Co-Chairs**

On July 18-19, 2007, coinciding with the visit to Barbados of Canada's Prime Minister, Mr. Stephen Harper, and benefiting from the gracious hospitality of the Caribbean Development Bank, more than forty eminent individuals from the Caribbean, representing a broad cross-section of countries and backgrounds in the region, met in Bridgetown for a collegial symposium.

The Canada-Caribbean Ideas Forum was an opportunity to gather Caribbean thinkers and reformers united by a common desire to build a prosperous, well-governed and safe neighbourhood. Their views and ideas on the opportunities and challenges facing the region enriched and helped inform Canadian decision-makers on how Canada and the Caribbean can further promote their enduring partnership on addressing the issues that really matter.

We believe that the Ideas Forum is an innovative approach to help foster a constructive and creative public policy debate. The enclosed report provides a synopsis of the collegial discussions that generated several practical proposals on critical issues where joint Canada-Caribbean efforts can make a difference. We would like to note in particular the imperative to invest in the development of the Caribbean's human capital - a theme that permeated throughout the two-day discussions.

The Ideas Forum helped reinforce our shared view that promoting basic democratic values, strengthening our economic linkages and meeting new security challenges are inter-linked and equally important objectives we must achieve. These objectives form the basis of Canada's commitment to playing a bigger role in the Americas and the Caribbean.

We would like to thank all the participants of the Canada-Caribbean Ideas Forum for their dedication and passion to present and promote the interests of the Caribbean. We also look forward to building on the model and success of the first Ideas Forum, and re-convening next year in Kingston, Jamaica.

Kevin Lynch  
Clerk of the Privy Council  
Government of Canada

Dr. Gordon Shirley  
Principal, Mona Campus  
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## **Caribbean Ideas Forum Bridgetown, Barbados 18-19 July 2007**

On July 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007, a group of Caribbean and Canadian representatives, united by a keen interest in the future of the Caribbean, met for the first Canada-Caribbean Ideas Forum in Bridgetown, Barbados. The event's purpose was to promote exchanges on future public policy choices and directions in the region. The approximately 40 Caribbean participants were not the usual "cast of characters" that normally gather to discuss policy issues. The meeting instead brought together eminent individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds, including: police; academia; judicial; finance and business sectors, along with a smaller number of Canadian officials and private sector organizations. While the discussions were lively and wide-ranging, they were focussed on the three interconnected themes of governance, prosperity and security. The discussions generated by such an eclectic group left participants with a fuller appreciation of the priorities and challenges that currently drive the area.

The Ideas Forum was a concrete example of how, given an opportunity, a group of individuals who are not regularly involved in public policy making, can nevertheless generate ideas and contribute a healthy dose of "common sense" to complex public policy issues. The Forum also established new linkages and further strengthened existing relationships between Caribbean and Canadian counterparts

The Forum identified important areas where concrete action can be taken by national governments, by the private sector and by community representatives, alone and in concert, to bolster the three priorities of governance, security and prosperity. In light of the success of the first forum, a second Ideas Forum, possibly in Jamaica, is being considered for 2008.

### **Report**

#### **Overview of format and participation:**

The Ideas Forum began on the evening of July 18, 2007. Participants attended the welcoming remarks made by the host, Dr. Compton Bourne, President of the Caribbean Development Bank, and the two co-chairs: Mr. Kevin Lynch, Clerk of the Privy Council (Government of Canada) and Ambassador Gordon Shirley, Principal-designate to the University of West Indies (UWI) MONA Campus in Jamaica. This was followed by a plenary theme-setting discussion, initiated by the chief facilitator, Mr. Jonathan Fried, the Canadian Executive Director at the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Over 40 Caribbean participants attended the Ideas Forum. They represented a diverse but very accomplished and influential group of experts - most of whom are leaders in their respective fields. This group included members of academia, regional organisations, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, labour, law enforcement, and the military. They were joined by a smaller group of Canadian officials and non-governmental leaders, along with representatives from regional organizations and think tanks.

#### **Highlights of discussions:**

##### **Cross-cutting themes**

Operating under the Chatham House Rule, participants engaged in a robust dialogue, where discussions were very collegial, and the tone invariably frank and peppered with heartfelt remarks.

A number of complementary themes and issues also arose, pointing to shared regional perspectives on the wider challenges and interests of the Caribbean region. These served to illustrate and validate the conventional wisdom that good governance, security and prosperity, are inter-linked and inter-dependent - and should not be viewed separately

### ***Developing human capital***

The lack of human capital, defined as a qualified workforce, emerged as one of the key challenges facing the region. The implications of this shortfall spill into almost every area. Essentially, schools and universities are not producing the quality and quantity of graduates and qualified labour required, resulting in a lack of competitiveness and expertise. The problem is exacerbated by the immigration policies of developed countries, including Canada, which contribute to 'brain drain'. A marked shortage of men seeking higher education and training was also discussed as a particularly worrisome trend.

### ***Transparency and participation in the public policy making process***

The average citizen in the region does not understand how public policy is formulated. This lack of understanding means that they are not contributing to the process, which in turn has a spiralling effect. The absence of a public debate and discussion breeds cynicism which in turn means that governments can't expect support when difficult decisions have to be made. As a result, citizens don't appreciate, for example, the goal or benefits of regional integration. Governments have a role, but are not alone, in encouraging public discourse, which will help develop long-term consensus.

### ***The national versus the regional***

Although there is broad recognition among participants that states need to maintain their sovereignty and independence, it is widely accepted that a broader, regional approach and the strengthening of regional institutions is essential to resolving key issues in all three areas of governance, prosperity and security. Several participants suggested that there is a limit to the "common Caribbean space" because each island has its own specific interests. Yet, most Caribbeans - at least in the English-speaking Caribbean – accept that there is a binding common identity and culture. The Ideas Forum also identified some of the challenges such as overcoming language and other barriers that are preventing some Caribbean countries such as Haiti and the Dominican Republic from coming into the fold.

### ***A time for optimism***

Many participants voiced their belief that the time is also ripe for a culture of optimism which should celebrate local and regional accomplishments (e.g., Cricket World Cup). Such increased confidence and self-reliance can help to encourage entrepreneurship and public discourse.

### **Conclusion:**

The Canada-Caribbean Ideas Forum represented a new and welcome approach to generating lively debate on the issues affecting the Caribbean. It served to inform Canadian government officials on approaches that could help to enhance and strengthen our engagement in the Caribbean. It further identified areas where constructive action can be taken by national governments, by the private sector and by civil society, alone and in concert. It will be important to follow-through on key issues identified at the Forum where Canada and others can make a direct contribution.

The Ideas Forum provided a concrete example of the public discussion needed to obtain consensus and buy-in within the Caribbean. Participants also appreciated the fact that Canadian policy-makers went to the region to engage and listen. They also noted that they looked forward to pursuing a second Ideas Forum next year. Kingston, Jamaica, was proposed as a likely location.

Without the enthusiasm, perseverance and expertise of many contributors, the Ideas Forum would not have happened. Special mention should be made of the staff of the Canadian High Commission and the Caribbean Development Bank in Bridgetown, and, naturally, to the participants, who readily accepted on short notice to dedicate their time and energy to share their passionately-held views on the future of the Caribbean.

## Governance Working Group: Main Findings

### **Free and fair elections are the bedrock of good governance in the region**

There is perhaps a need to set clearer standards for free and fair elections. Generally speaking, the Caribbean has fairly well-functioning electoral systems and the overall record is positive. However, there are areas that could be improved including party financing regulations and security.

### **Rebuilding trust in government, ensuring accountability and transparency**

There is a need to rebuild trust in judiciary, parliament, government and public services. In this regard, the issue of leadership and leadership development, in all sectors, is crucial. It was agreed that much more needs to be done to improve leadership in the region. It was suggested that the University of West Indies has an important role to play in these efforts in cooperation with other Caribbean Universities.

### **Strengthen policy and decision making, at both national and regional levels**

More research, region-wide statistics and data and evidence based decision-making are needed. There is also a need for more participatory decision-making and to involve different constituencies, at both the national and regional levels.

### **Strengthening regional governance**

Strengthening regional institutions, both their capacity and their accountability became evident, as well as the need for more collective decision-making, and the effective implementation of these decisions.

### **Independent, trusted, neutral public service**

In recent times there has been a tendency to politicize the public service. There is a need to revisit the role of the Public Service Commission, and work towards restoring a merit-based professional public service.

## Security Working Group: Main Findings

### **Security: a broad concept**

The discussion was broadened to capture the soft (e.g. banking, health, youth, environmental & disaster preparedness) and hard issues (e.g. intelligence sharing, military transport). Security threats emanating from drugs and the emergence of crime and violence places significant strains on the region, including on the tourism sector. Given the large numbers of Canadians travelling to the region, security cooperation was deemed a topic of deep mutual interest.

### **The regional dimension**

The theme of national sovereignty often came up, recognizing that drugs and natural disasters do not respect national boundaries. Repeatedly, the successes of the Cricket World Cup (CWC) served as concrete evidence that it is possible to overcome jurisdictional barriers to realize common objectives, and that lessons learned should help propel regional security cooperation efforts. The CWC Regional Intelligence Fusion Centre and agreements reached on regional arrest warrants and visas were noted as successful examples of regional cooperation. It was also noted that efforts to build on the CWC experience should be done in concert with the CARICOM Security Directorate.

### **The Regional Security System (RSS)**

Repeated references were made to the RSS with respect to its capacity to support and further regional security cooperation. It was noted that the RSS is ideally suited to support regional disaster relief, in

cooperation with CIDERA (the regional emergency preparedness institution) and to function as a mechanism for dealing with security challenges, including the flow of illegal drugs. There was strong backing for the RSS and its possible expansion to other countries in the region. It seemed less a question of “whether” and more an issue of the “when” and “how” to have the entity move forward.

### **Youth**

At the local level, there was serious concern over problems associated with youth – indeed, the future of the region. Participants stressed that these issues must be addressed because they are spiralling out of control, and there is currently no real discussion between youth and government. It was recognised that youth, especially males, are at risk of being lured to crime from a very early stage. There is further concern that there is currently a serious decline in role models to detract from the temptation of crime, suggesting that mechanisms and programs need to be developed to divert youth from crime. Participants suggested developing relevant programming at the pre-school level to divert youth from engaging in crime. “Turf-ism” battles between youth gangs, and criminal groups preying on youth, were pointed out as disturbing trends. A number of practical programming ideas and specific examples from NGO communities in Jamaica were shared (e.g. youth and community policing, liaison with Canadian youth through their travel to and work with communities in the region) in an effort to curb this disturbing trend.

### **Deportees**

It was noted that deportees are often returning after long periods in other countries. Integration is therefore difficult and they often revert to crime, providing yet more dangerous models for youth at risk. The need for more discussion with deportation countries is therefore necessary to better track deportees. There is also a critical need to create (re)integration programs in order to help deportees settle into new surroundings.

## **Prosperity Working Group: Main Findings**

### **Economic planning and fiscal discipline**

More transparency is required. There is a need to reach national consensus and a “sustainable economic development vision” (mobilizing business, government, and civil society organizations). There is also a need to design a development framework that is properly aligned; strikes a careful balance between political economy realities and draws a line between incentives to attract investment and concessions to keep these flowing.

### **Policy making**

Participants recognized a need to promote participation in the policy making process with a focus on dialogue vs. confrontation. Goals should integrate what can be done at local vs. regional level. We should ensure that gains from regional integration are distributed equally (i.e. to smaller and more vulnerable Caribbean economies). There was also some suggestion that we develop benchmarks that are “made in the Caribbean” (as opposed to those authored by international financial institutions and donors), and consensus-driven. For example: educating the public on policy formulation and issues is key. We also need to deepen efforts to link national, regional and Canadian research institutes to share best information and practices.

### **Investing in human capital**

The group identified the theme of investing in human capital as fundamental and critical for prosperity and growth. There exists a need to address capacity in schools and universities to ensure they can produce a pool of qualified labour with right capabilities and in sufficient numbers. Human capital has a direct impact on productivity. Participants agreed that there is a need to promote an open system which will encourage the new generation to take pride and serve in the public service. It was mentioned several times that “a service-oriented government and one that works” is key to spur economic growth.

## Master of our own destiny: celebrating Caribbean success

The group suggested promoting a culture of entrepreneurship and risk taking. It should mobilize the financial sector to show leadership and respond to challenges such as the needs of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Campaigns should also stress the importance of investing in savings. These should further celebrate success and propagate lessons learned.

### Suggestions for Future Policy Directions

The following themes were identified as priority areas of focus where more research and work would help inform new policy directions and where governments could focus their efforts:

- **Human capital capacity building and training:** by far the most pressing challenge, essential to foster growth, ensure accountable and efficient governance, and deal with the security challenges. Building capacity and designing training programs were suggested in the following areas:
  - Ensuring **educational institutions** (from vocational schools to universities) can produce the right quality and quantity of graduates.
  - Forging mechanisms that promote **real dialogue between government and civil society** to broaden participation in the public policy making process and beyond the electoral cycle.
  - In the areas of security, focus on disaster-relief preparedness, cyber-crime, establishing databases, anti-smuggling, and human trafficking capacity and intelligence sharing.
  - Supporting anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism financing, including a role for Canada and others to support the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF). Tax evasion and avoidance are also areas where capacity could be strengthened.
- **Leadership building program** by focusing on developing a cadre of professionals with a regional (as opposed to national) perspective, as this would also economies of scale. Help with the financing and programming to train experts/generalists who can help the region move forward. These efforts must be mindful, however, that a fit-all approach –which would risk alienating some countries in the region- would not work because of the varying levels of development, capacity and associated needs. A differentiated approach must therefore form part of the mix.
- **Judicial reform:** There currently exist three different legal systems in the region: Haiti, Suriname, and English-speaking countries. It is also widely accepted that in a context of resource constraints, the judiciary could also benefit from a regional approach which would identify areas where economies of scale could be found. This would be of particular benefit for smaller jurisdictions that are hard-pressed in building (and from a regional perspective replicating) the legal frameworks and institutions to support and complement ongoing efforts towards “governments that deliver” and competitive economies.
- **Caribbean identity and integration:** Who are we as a people? The answer differs from country to country, as a universal sense of a Caribbean identity is not shared by everyone in the region. Integrating Haiti and Surinam in Caribbean integration efforts inevitably brings to the fore additional linguistic and cultural challenges.
- **Creating an intelligence forum** to bridge and build confidence between Caribbean and allied (U.S., Canada, U.K. etc.) intelligence communities. A Cricket World Cup “lessons learned” forum could serve as a way to convene parties and help disseminate best practices to other regional cooperation initiatives.
- **Engaging youth:** build on successful Jamaican projects (e.g. youth diversion, community

policing) to address the crucial issue of diverting youth from crime. Creating opportunities for international youth to work with Caribbean Youth.

- **Taxation regimes:** Ensuring that tax legislation in investment-source countries does not work against gains made in Caribbean financial sector and the attraction of international offshore companies.
- **Promoting** integration in the banking sector and financial sector regulatory harmonization efforts in the Caribbean. The “mentorship” of countries experienced with multi-jurisdictional regulatory environment would be useful.
- **Advancing SME-specific interests** (policy and implementation).
- **Fostering an entrepreneurship culture**, perhaps through private-public partnerships

### Additional Information on the Organization and Participation of the Event

On day one, the 90 minute plenary discussion effectively served as a scene setter, introducing participants to the three key objectives of Canada’s Americas Strategy, namely: prosperity, security and democratic governance. Early in the discussion, the co-chairs clarified the goals and expectations of the Forum, and set the tone: “Let us be humble in our objectives and planned outcome for the Ideas Forum; the goal is not to present a prescription to governments and instruct them to act; this is an opportunity to have a broad discussion to enrich the public discourse which can translate into public policy; and let’s work towards identifying 2-3 actionable items”.

On the second day, in order to facilitate an interactive discussion, participants were divided into three working groups, each led by a facilitator. Dr. Carla Barnett (Consulting Economist, former Financial Secretary of Belize) led the prosperity group, Mr. Kelvin Dalrymple (CDB Chief Country Economist) the security group, and Dr. Deryck Brown (Deputy Director, Governance and Development, Commonwealth Secretariat) facilitated the governance session. After a two-hour discussion (which invariably was deemed “too short”), the groups convened in plenary where the facilitators reported to the co-chairs on the respective break-out sessions.

The selection of participants was based on a number of selection criteria, including gender, geographic representation (considering as well relative demographic weight of Caribbean countries), and fields of expertise. The list was prepared with input from several parties, including Canadian regional posts, international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF, the regional developments banks (i.e. IADB and CDB) and a network of think-tanks and Caribbean affairs watchers.

Participants had the opportunity to briefly present their profiles and volunteer a personal perspective on the Ideas Forum. Participants then attended Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s key note address, which made an explicit reference to the Ideas forum (please see link: <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=1770>). Following the speech, the Forum co-chairs and facilitators had an opportunity to meet and briefly debrief the PM on their discussions. This session was followed by a group photo. The Ideas Forum concluded with a reception on board the HMCS Fredericton, which was conducting a ship visit in Bridgetown.