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**WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE MOST HON P.J. PATTERSON
PRIME MINISTER OF JAMAICA
OPENING CEREMONY, CARIBBEAN MARKETPLACE 2005
SUNDAY JANUARY 9, 2005 AT 7:00 P.M. AT THE HALF MOON,
MONTEGO BAY**

SALUTATIONS:

Mr. Chairman

Hon Minister of Industry and Tourism Aloun Ndombet-Assamba

Your Worship the Mayor of Montego Bay

President of the Caribbean Hotel Association, Mrs. Berthia Parle
and officials of the CHA

International delegates

Representatives of National Hotel Associations, officials from Tourism
Ministries, Tourist Boards and other members of the tourism fraternity from
across the region...

Members of the international, regional and local media

Ladies and gentlemen...

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On the last occasion that I had the pleasure of being a part of a meeting with the then newly appointed President of the Caribbean Hotel Association, the Heads of Government of the CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY were so captivated by the challenges thrown out by that lady, that what was slated to be a ten-minute presentation extended to an hour before anyone had noticed what was happening.

I observed the tight time frame allowed for this opening ceremony and wondered if the passion and breadth of knowledge of Mrs. Parle and the many others who ably represent Caribbean tourism, could be contained within a half an hour.

May I add my word of warm welcome to Jamaica, to the President, the Director General and other officials of the Caribbean Hotel Association, and all those from within and outside the region who have come together for this twenty-fifth staging of Caribbean Marketplace.

The CHA is to be congratulated on the development of an event that has arguably become a Caribbean institution, bringing together as it has over the last quarter century, national hotel associations and their allied members representing the best of our regional tourism product, to interact on the trading floor with business partners from across the globe.

The success and ever increasing relevance of the event is attributable to its ability to encapsulate for the discerning tourism “buyer” the extraordinary beauty and diversity of the Caribbean landscape; the unique melding of cultures coming out of a shared history and heritage; the synthesis of knowledge and the collaborative offer of a visitor experience that is integrated, while as vividly varied in tone and colour as the Caribbean Sea.

There is no gainsaying the centrality of institutions serving the needs of Caribbean tourism. Our region is among the most tourism dependent in the world with travel and tourism estimated to have contributed nearly 15% of the Caribbean’s GDP last year, and accounting for 2.4 million jobs directly and indirectly. Apart from the vagaries of international geopolitical, social and economic developments to which tourism is particularly sensitive, Caribbean tourism, with some notable exceptions, is also a mature industry with the attendant challenges of ever increasing global competition from newcomers and the imperative to respond to changing international

demands. In many respects, to adapt a famous advertising slogan, we in the Caribbean, have long learnt to “try harder.”

Recognizing tourism as a critical activity in meeting the economic and social needs of our people, Jamaica, as is the case with some sister nations of the region, has crafted and begun implementation of a comprehensive Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development. This Plan, in keeping with the changing nature of global tourism, and the expectations of our travel partners and visitors, reflects a future market position more strongly based on our natural, cultural, *sporting*, historic and built heritage.

There is considerable focus on providing an improved investment climate on the island, building further on investment initiatives which have resulted in some 10,000 hotel rooms slated to come on stream on this island over the next ten years. Here I pause to commend the CHA on its own efforts to advance the region’s business and investment partnerships through the staging of its annual investment conference which Jamaica was pleased to host last year.

Jamaica’s Tourism Master Plan, aggressive implementation of which began in 2004, commits to adequate and on-going funding for product development, in tandem with major development of our air and seaports, our highway network and utilities. There is increased focus on attractions, on internationally recognized measures to achieve environmental sustainability for the future protection of the tourist industry, and greater community involvement in providing a more rewarding visitor experience.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

It is recognized by the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community and in the wider region that the timely achievement of our objectives for tourism requires even greater policy focus on this industry as a driver for economic and social development at the national and regional levels. Indeed, tourism must occupy a central plank in our accelerated efforts to put in place the instruments and institutions to realize the vision of a Caribbean which has the ability to present a strong, united economic front and superior standards in product quality and service delivery in the context of a new global reality that will accept nothing less.

Caribbean Marketplace is a tourism marketing event, one which, since its inauguration, has successfully served regional tourism interests, our respective national economies, and our international tourism partners. But I dare say that this event represents much more, a fact particularly obvious with the coming on stream this year of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy.

In keeping with global imperatives and our ambitions as Caribbean people, the Caribbean Single market and Economy will see participating Caribbean nations which have functioned as separate entities with distinct markets and economies, move toward economic integration, free from restrictive barriers and individual rules which, in many cases, have retarded our individual and collective development.

On January 5, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados, completed formalities bringing into force single market arrangements among these three countries, with the other participants expected to complete the necessary legislative and other arrangements to allow full implementation of the CSME by December 2005.

I believe that it is more than merely coincidental that we practically launch what has been designated by the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the **“Year of the Single Market”** with the most important regional marketing event for the tourist industry. Caribbean Marketplace presents a case study over twenty-five years of the strength that can be forged through institutions based on our shared regional identity, and practical pooling of resources for effective penetration and satisfaction of external markets.

The CSME will build on the traditional strengths of respective Caribbean countries and encourage an ethos of exchange that will extend beyond the CARICOM partners to the region as a whole. There are direct and far reaching implications for tourism in the free movement across the region of personnel, goods, services and capital to be implemented under the Caribbean Single Market and Economy. Areas presenting tangible opportunities, some of which are already being pursued include:

- Substantially expanded Pan Caribbean ownership in tourism ventures including cruise shipping
- Manufacturing, targeting the tourism sector
- Innovative and tailored financial services for the region

- Music and entertainment including management services for these activities
- Expanded economic linkages, including the production of more uniquely identifiable Caribbean agricultural and food products.

It is also, of course, self evident that a single Caribbean voice allows much stronger positioning in critical trade negotiations in which the region is involved, including liberalization of service sectors under the World Trade Organization, with the attendant implications for the tourist industry.

Ladies and Gentlemen, there are undoubted challenges in realizing the overall vision for regional growth embodied in the Caribbean Single Market and Economy, and the vision of planned, sustainable growth for tourism in the region. Not least is ensuring impressive airline service to meet the needs of the tourist industry. It is in recognition of this imperative that the Government of Jamaica has temporarily assumed responsibility for Air Jamaica to re-establish the airline on a sound financial footing while ensuring the continuation of the high quality service for which the airline is renowned.

This is a dynamic period for world tourism which last year rebounded to record growth of a magnitude that was last recorded twenty years ago. The performance of Caribbean tourism is in line with global trends, confirming the inherent strength of our product and, not least, of the relationships that the region enjoys with its international tourism partners who are so well represented here tonight.

This year's renewal of Caribbean Marketplace will, no doubt, contribute to the strengthening of those relationships and furthering of the private/public sector partnerships upon which tourism must be built.

Caribbean marketplace is as much a celebration of Caribbean tourism as it is a business forum. But as we celebrate with our partners our successes, and set the stage for the year ahead, we pause to share the pain of the people of Southeast Asia, and the many international travelers to that area, who have suffered untold loss in the catastrophe wreaked by the recent earthquake and tsunamis in that part of our global village.

Tonight I extend a warm Jamaican welcome to all delegates to the twenty-fifth staging of Caribbean Marketplace. I wish you a productive and profitable period on the trading floor, and a most enjoyable visit to Jamaica.

It is my great pleasure to declare CARIBBEAN MARKETPLACE 2005 open. May it meet and exceed your expectations.

End.