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**In aid of causes that need assistance
Toronto, Canada***

Mr. High Commissioner, Mr. Consul General, Madam President, fellow Barbadians, other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

First let me thank you for the invitation and say how pleased my wife Sylvan and I are to be able to join you this evening at what is a splendid example of a cooperative effort in aid of worthy causes. Not only do you support worthy causes, but by doing so you help to cement even further the links between Canada and Barbados which have benefitted both countries. These are linkages that go back centuries. The trade between Barbados and Canada by the famous Nova Scotia Bluenose schooners brought Canada our rum and molasses and brought us their lumber and codfish. I am also pleased because you give me the opportunity to speak to a group of people to whom one does not have to explain every joke or cricket analogy.

I must tell you however that I was a bit concerned at the role I should play. I went to your website and saw the description of this event as *"a gala Black Tie affair at which guests enjoy a fabulous dinner with Barbadian highlights, dancing to live entertainment, a sampling of the flora, fauna, sights and sounds of Barbados; and of course, good Bajan company."* There was no mention of a guest speaker so I began to wonder if I qualified as being part of the flora and fauna of Barbados. Perhaps someday I will when I am pushing up the daisies or the poinsettias, but not just yet.

You are of course members of a very important Barbadian diaspora and whenever I address groups from the diaspora, I think of the origin of the term which is to spread, as with seed, although it refers more now to movement of people sharing common ethnic identity that were forced or in your case voluntarily left their homes. I like the analogy of seed which has fallen on fertile ground and your contributions in a way represent some of the fruits of those seeds. The diaspora almost by definition are interested in what happens at home, for as one of my favorite Latin quotations says—"those who cross the sea change but the sky and not the heart", and we accept that nature has implanted in all or most of us an indissoluble link to the place from which we derived our birth and infant nurture—as Gabby would say, from the place where our navel strings are buried. I wonder if that practice still continues!

* Presented at the Barbados Ball Canada Aid, Toronto, Canada, 13 June 2009

There is nostalgia for the things we remember and see often through rosy-tinted spectacles. But you would be amazed how many in the diaspora do not wish to remember some of the parts of the life that was perhaps not as rosy. I recall asking a group how many remembered picking chigoes, had been bitten by a bed bug, had used a Flit can, or remembered flying-fish at all-a-penny. I wont ask you those things and be embarrassed by the stony silence that could follow.

But I will not fault your memory of things Barbadian as so much has changed, and of course all of the change has been built on the foundation of Barbados' past. Barbados has been cited as one of the world's most successful small economies and much has often been written about the Barbados model of economic management and the level of education and sophistication of Barbadians. This sophistication comes in many forms- in our art, our music and even in our beach boys as one visitor recounted to me

But the inevitable change and perhaps some of the practices that our friends on the beach display has brought some new challenges in health. One of these is HIV and I am pleased to note that one of your objectives is to foster education and awareness as one of the means for preventing the spread of HIV. This has to be one of the most challenging health problems with which we have had to deal- a mixture of sex, blood, religion, morals, ethics makes for a potent brew.

I am sure that you have researched the face of HIV in Barbados, so I will give you a very brief account particularly from my perspective as the Secretary General's Special Envoy. I will avoid the statistics, but there is no doubt that although there has been tremendous progress, there is still a lot to be done, as the epidemic is far from over. Barbados provides free treatment for all persons with HIV/AIDS and has been one of the most successful countries in reducing and almost eliminating transmission of the virus from mother to child. The organization of the national response has been excellent. The main challenge faced is that there are increasing numbers of persons still being infected with the virus and one of my main concerns is that the infection rate is rising faster in young girls than in any other group. I confess to being a bit surprised and worried at the research data on the attitudes of many young women to sex and sexual practices and the extent to which sexual expression is almost a symbol or badge of positive selfhood to be flaunted openly.

In addition, the rampant homophobia and its intensity has surprised many of us and this is not helped by laws against homosexual practice which have been abandoned in most of the civilized world, but in the Caribbean are a holdover from British colonial penal systems. We have thrown off many of the shackles of colonialism but not this one. In spite of all the evidence of the widespread homosexuality among prisoners, condoms are not formally allowed in prisons.

All of this brings me to the importance of your support for education and awareness about the virus, because we all agree that the answer lies in prevention. The approaches to prevention have been recognized as falling essentially into three categories.

There are proven biomedical interventions such as condom use and male circumcision but the latter is not popular in the Caribbean. Then there are the behavioral aspects which are encompassed in the ABC recommendation of abstinence, fidelity and condom use and finally the structural or mainly social modifications that are necessary. We advocate that the prevention response should encompass all three. There is no doubt that this emphasis on prevention of HIV transmission and the approaches to be used are equally relevant to Barbados and Canada and the emphasis on the youth is to be encouraged and emphasized in both places.

Barbados is a good example of the trend in HIV that is occurring in many parts of the world, including Canada. Because of the effectiveness of therapy, persons with AIDS are now living much longer and AIDS is becoming one of the diseases that need chronic care. Many of the structures and systems put in place for chronic disease have relevance for HIV/AIDS and vice versa. Barbados has shown commendable concern for the major problem of chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs). It has the highest prevalence of diabetes among adults in the western hemisphere and Professor Hennis has data that show that over a recent six year period almost 1000 amputations were done at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital because of diabetes. This is of course linked to the epidemic of obesity which plagues Barbadian men and women. But Barbados has established a National Commission on NCDs which is spearheading efforts to address the major risk factors-tobacco, diet and physical inactivity. I must congratulate the Prime Minister for his measures to remove tobacco products from those that can be purchased duty free and for raising substantially the tax on tobacco.

Part of the Barbados' success has been its social and human capital, one complementing the other, and the University of the West Indies plays a major role in this development. The world is a cold and unfriendly place for small countries, and perhaps even colder now as the current economic crisis swirls around and threatens our livelihoods and perhaps is one of those times of need. But we are convinced that our University has a major role to play in driving much of the development that we must have-a development that is measured not only in economic terms. Many Caribbean people do not quite appreciate the size of that enterprise. There are now about 40,000 students enrolled in the University and about 8,000 of these are at Cave Hill with about half of these in the Social Sciences. One of the critical recent developments has been Cave Hill Evening that caters predominantly for working professionals who wish to pursue their studies on a part time basis. Last year saw a major development with the launching of the Open Campus which will drive the development of blended distance and presential learning with a major focus on countries beside Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago.

The physical expansion of the campus has been impressive and I hope that you will visit it when next you are in Barbados. I know you will be impressed and I hope you will note specifically the Errol Barrow Center for the Creative Imagination and the new administration building which is in the shape of the golden stool of the Ashanti and was formally opened by the King of the Ashanti Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Asantahene. One of the developments which pleases me is the program MACHO-Males at Cave Hill

Operation which is attempting to change the gender balance so that more males come into the University. We had reached the stage at which about two-thirds to three-quarters of the students were female. This is not good for the University or for society as a whole. I did not see this in your objectives, but I hope some of your scholarships will go to Canadian students who wish to study at the University of the West Indies.

I am often asked in gatherings such as these about what you can do. In this context I laud the Barbados Ball Canada Aid, as through organizations like these individuals can multiply the impact of their single contributions. In addition, I think such organizations can be important in the follow up, evaluation and monitoring of the contributions made, and indeed can do it better than individuals.

Let me thank you again and if I have spoken too much about Barbados, I hope the non-Barbadian guests will forgive me and accept that the pride is not boastful, but one must or should speak about what one knows.

So let me wish you a very successful and enjoyable evening, perhaps in the words of an old Irish toast.

*May you work like you don't need the money;
Love like you have never been hurt;
Dance like no one is watching;
And drink like a true Irishman-or should I say Barbadian*

Or perhaps in a more sedate fashion quote from Byron

*On with the dance!
Let joy be unconfined
No sleep till morn, when Youth and Pleasure meet
To chase the glowing hours with flying feet.*

Thank you for your attention.