

At the 15th General Assembly of the Organisation of American States in Cartagena in 1985, perhaps the most significant milestone in hemispheric integration was achieved, when the charter was amended in its Article 8 to provide for membership of all independent states of the hemisphere. This amendment made possible the full membership of Guyana and Belize.

It is important to record here the determination and resourcefulness of the Caribbean members in the realisation of that achievement. Their contribution in collaboration with the other members of the organisation has served to universalise the membership of the organisation. But it has done much more. It has served to consolidate Caribbean membership within the Organisation of American States.

A consolidated Caribbean membership cannot be an end in itself but an instrumentality in the service of the region and the wider hemisphere.

Historically, the Caribbean has been one of the great theatres in the struggle of mankind to secure recognition of human rights.

Caribbean states bring to the organisation solidarity with the charter

objective on this important question, an hemispheric strengthening of this principle and the potential consolidation of a regional approach for the universalisation of the pursuit of that goal throughout the hemisphere.

Political stability through the establishment of the democratic process is an ultimate objective of the organisation. The process towards self governance in the Caribbean has served to establish democracy as a fundamental of their political culture.

This political culture, through the membership of the organisation, has broadened the configuration of democracy throughout the hemisphere and brought about a decided impact upon the process of democratic change in the region.

The consolidation of the democratic process might conceivably be one of the major contributions of Latin America and the Caribbean as an organisation to the wider world.

The consolidation of democracy and the entrenchment of human rights among peoples of the hemisphere are required bases for political stability and human fulfilment. They are necessary but not sufficient conditions for development. They must now serve as the underpinnings to the larger economic cause.

This is the direction in which the organisation has begun to chart its future course and it is in this area that Caribbean states, through the recently expanded Caricom and the Dominican Republic can make their greatest contribution.

In preparation for its focus and thrust into the new millennium, the Organisation of American States has promulgated a new vision. That new vision is based primarily on the concept of partnership for development.

The concept of partnership for development was enunciated and mandated by the special session of the general assembly in Mexico in February 1994. It was endorsed by the general assemblies in Haiti in June 1995 and in Panama in June 1996. It is around this concept that the new vision is crafted. The practice of partnership for development will therefore underpin the general phi-

losophy and action of the organisation in its future engagement with the hemisphere. That practice will be pursued through several broad areas. Primary among them are:

1. Consolidation of the regional political culture of democracy through institution building and the strengthening of civic processes and human rights in collaboration with member states. This must always constitute a fundamental function.

A recent seminar in the Caribbean on governance, democracy and civil society, identified certain alarming weaknesses and stresses in Caribbean democratic practice and emphasised the vital need for careful and continuous management of its democratic system.

2. Integrating within the progressive political climate a range of social services through a refocused council for integral development.

3. The progressive development of regional legal regimes or compatible regional regimes to effect coordinated and harmonised responses and actions in seeking to circumscribe, discourage,

prevent, prosecute and hopefully eliminate increasing cross boundary and transnational illegal activities within our region and beyond. An example of this is the hemispheric anti-drug strategy subscribed to in Montevideo in 1996 and its attendant elaboration of legislation on money laundering, illegal production, trafficking and use of drugs and psychotropic substances.

4. Increasing engagement of social issues and questions which undermine the fabric of society and pervert established social values.

5. The full and effective incorporation of women in the development and management of the region.

6. The crafting of an hemispheric free trade agreement which will explicitly address the effective and equitable participation of all its members.

These six areas suggest an increasing social focus of the organisation's activities. This explicit social outreach of the organisation's agenda is essentially what the new vision proposes.

This focus is more spontaneous than it appears and is both derivative and interpretative of the perception and mood of the region.

The organisation will be embarking on this agenda through the following mechanisms:

- Widening network of regional outreach through updating, expanding and developing cooperation agreements with other regional and international bodies.

- The mobilisation of external resources through the larger family of the organisation involving permanent observer member states, foundations, private sector and financial institutions.

- The restructuring of training to enhance social sector development, increase employment and stimulate entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise industry among the youth and female population, particularly in the burgeoning informal sector where unemployment and under-employment present grave threats to social disruption and dissolution of social order.

- The promotion of regional dialogue and consequent joint action on important social and developmental issues.

In this latter regard, I point to the enhanced political function that the organisation expects to develop and pursue in the larger context of the unfolding structural mandates that will inevitably follow from the mechanism of the regional summits of heads of state and government.

The unique position of the organisation as the single political body which comprises all independent member states of the hemisphere places it in a central position to cohere and coordinate this wider hemispheric agenda.

A review of recent agendas of the conference of heads of government of the Caribbean community indicate that the

direction proposed by the organisation for the new millennium is both consonant and compatible with the priority questions which trouble and engage the sub-region.

All independent Caricom member states are members of the organisation. Undeniably therefore, there exists a community of interests between Caricom and the organisation.

How then can Caricom contribute in shaping this mutually shared socioeconomic interest to its benefit and that of the wider region? Let me suggest a few pertinent considerations.

It has now been agreed by the membership of the organisation that the 50th anniversary should be an occasion for review, refocus and restooling. The dynamics of this exercise will, of course, be determined by the perceived priorities of member states. Caricom is the largest and one of the most sophisticated sub groupings within the organisation.

Its central membership within the larger association of Caribbean states which was brought into being at Caricom's initiative and whose interests can therefore only be mutually supportive and afford strategic leverage for the mobilisation of expanded community advocacy within the organisation's membership.

Caricom has now developed sustained visibility and profile within the organisation. Its consolidated membership provides it, for the first time, with the opportunity to articulate its vision of the region and the hemisphere, and the occasion of the 50th anniversary offers both the circumstance and the moment for this thematic initiative in - a new vision for the organisation.

It is my view, therefore, that a Caricom vision must certainly inform the continuing elaboration of the vision of our region for the next millennium.