

African-Caribbean Centre Opened at UWI, Jamaica - The St Kitts Nevis Observer

A centre designed to coordinate public policy and advocacy by fostering development relations between the Caribbean and Africa was launched at The University of the West Indies last Friday.

Named the PJ Patterson Centre for Africa-Caribbean Advocacy, it has former Jamaica Prime Minister PJ Patterson as 'Statesman in Residence'.

Patterson, who was prime minister from 1992 to 2005, is highly respected for his commitment to regionalism. He was a lead negotiator for the African Caribbean and Pacific Group during the Lomé Convention, was in charge of external negotiations involving the World Trade Organisation, the Free Trade Area of the Americas and the Economic Partnership Agreement.

He has also worked closely with the African Union which named him 'Relevant Caribbean Statesman' when it designated the diaspora the "Sixth Region Of the Continent" in 2003.

Speaking at the launch of the centre, The UWI Vice Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles said the facility has the blessing of the entire UWI and Prime Minister Andrew Holness, who has offered his support.

"No centre in any university could have been more timely. The conversations taking place in the world today point to a need for us as people in the modern world to remove the debilitating features of colonisation, slavery, and all the other extractive models that have demonstrated harm to this region over many centuries," Sir Hilary said.

"The world is looking for justice. The world is looking for a new sensibility and certainly the people of the Caribbean are looking for a new relationship with ancestral Africa," he added.

He said that Jamaica "invested heavily in the liberation of Africa, starting with the late Marcus Garvey laying the foundation for that vision. But, long before Garvey, Caribbean folks have been talking about liberation and the freedom of Africa and the Caribbean place within it".

According to Sir Hilary, The UWI, as part of the re-visioning of the 21st Century Caribbean, has established centres in other countries, among them one in China dealing with software engineering; Brock University Canada on Canada /Caribbean relations; and State University of New York dealing with USA joint programmes for development. Shortly another centre will be established in the European Union that will assist in the post-Brexit Caribbean interest in Europe.

"The 21st Century is going to be about the rekindling and the rebuilding of bridges with the African continent which is a critical part of Caribbean civilisation, which has been the basis of our sense of popular identity, and so we have also established a centre at The University of Lagos and at the University of Johannesburg — the Centre for Global Africa. We are poised to bring all of this to a sense of rendezvous of victory where we are all placed this day to formally launch the PJ Patterson Centre for Africa-Caribbean Advocacy," Sir Hilary |declared.

In his reply, Patterson referenced the COVID-19 pandemic, arguing that "the world we knew no longer exists. The world that emerges will be entirely different".

He said "the reconfiguration of global power and the restructuring of the global economy cannot be

left to the market or the dictates of a few determined to continue to shape the future by unilateral decisions without international consultation. The interest of the less developed, less powerful, and most vulnerable can no longer be ignored. The peoples of African descent must forge through dialogue to a consensus agenda to articulate a vision of a reordered world in which our governments and regional organisations have a leadership role”.

Added Patterson: “We propose a dialogue at the level of the heads of government to agree on a common agenda and to initiate a programme of international cooperation among countries in Africa and its global diaspora of people of African descent.”

He said there is a compelling need for the African Union and Caricom “to act in tandem with all the international organisations to which we belong, to ensure that our regions and rights and interests of our peoples, especially women, children, and persons with disabilities, are actively defended”.

Patterson said in the current context of a global political and economic crisis, the centre will aim to contribute to the intellectual dialogue which can help to formulate and assist in the technical analysis, without which our just cause will never be accomplished.

“Caricom and the African Union must marshal the political will, backed by the compelling evidence, in order to combat global racism, wherever in the world this is manifested and to promote a deeper understanding of the historical processes that have engendered poverty and social justice on our planet earth,” he said.

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