

Press release 247/2011
(01 July 2011)

CITATION
Presented to
SIR EDWIN WILBERFORCE CARRINGTON
On the occasion of the conferment of
the award of the
ORDER OF THE
CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY
at the Opening Ceremony
of the 32nd Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the
Caribbean Community
Cecil Jacobs Auditorium
Basseterre
St Kitts and Nevis



Heads of Government and other delegates, you will be forgiven if before tonight you did not know of Parlatuvier, a small town on the North Coast of Tobago. It is now to become immortalized in the annals of history. It is the place where Edwin Wilberforce Carrington took root before spreading his wings as a fledgling to Scarborough, the capital of Tobago, and then to Port- of-Spain, on the mainland of Trinidad. There he flourished at the top of his class at all levels and brought to fruition the early promise of academic excellence.

This “bright boy” from Parlatuvier in Tobago combined talent and determination: making his parents and siblings proud; winning the adulation of his peers; copping scholarships that transported him to the University College of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica and subsequently to Mc Gill University, in Montreal, Canada. He was among the last batch of UCWI students to be certified with a Bachelor of Arts Degree by the University of London and was later awarded a Master of Arts Degree from the University of the West Indies.

There, in these distant lands, it was as if the Mona moon and the subterranean climes of Montreal inspired even higher levels of scholarly conquests and maturity of spirit, thus laying the foundation for a career as eminent scholar, consummate diplomat, outstanding CEO and man of public affairs.

There is little challenge in composing a portrait of Edwin Wilberforce Carrington as a breathing person. It is even less of a challenge finding distinctive features and a motif in which to portray his gigantic contributions to this Caribbean Community. And as an interlude in the movements of his career symphony, he helped to orchestrate the convergence of Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific States as integral players in the global configuration of development.

In this regard, the canvas of his achievements looms large in the international arena. The Edwin Carrington Hall that adorns the ACP Secretariat in Brussels is a mere symbol of the high esteem in which he is held. Such is the measure of the man that stands before you today to receive the highest acclamation of a Region for which he gave a lifetime of valiant service.

Edwin Carrington attributes much of the reason for his meteoric rise in the international arena to his mentors, William Demas, the quintessential regionalist, and Sir Alister McIntyre, his economic professor. Both former Secretaries-General were masters of the art from whom he learned invaluable lessons of maneuvering the choppy waters of international negotiations and weathering the stormy conditions of international politics. He was to have had a short stint in academia as Junior Research Fellow at the Institute of Social and Economic Research, UWI, St Augustine before joining the CARICOM Secretariat in Georgetown (CARIFTA as it then was) only to move rapidly up the ranks to Director of the Trade and Integration Division in which he served with distinction.

It was however as a CARICOM representative in the negotiations of the first Lomé convention in 1975 that Edwin Carrington demonstrated he was ready to assume the role beyond that of a supporting actor. His elevation to the position of Deputy Secretary-General of the new ACP group in 1977 and his subsequent appointment as the first, and still the only, West Indian to hold the post of Secretary-General (1986-1991) were significant landmarks. They allowed him to fully demonstrate over a 13-year period, considerable managerial skills and prodigious energies dedicated to the establishment of the ACP group as a meaningful instrument for the improvement of economic cooperation between the ACP and the EEC. To be able to witness at close hand how the European integration actually functioned made him fully cognizant of the virtues as well as the pitfalls of applying that model to CARICOM. When, therefore, “Carrie”, as he is affectionately called, assumed the position of Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community in July 1992, he was by all judgments the ideal candidate. The appellation “Carrie-come” (meaning Carrie has arrived) was therefore most apt. After 13 years at the ACP and in proximity to the European Union, he fully understood the challenges involved in integration arrangements and of making things happen with limited resources. Surmounting these hurdles had become the hallmark of his success.

And so it was. Eighteen years as the longest serving Secretary-General have revealed the mettle of this man. The CARICOM Commission’s Report *Time for Action* was formally presented to the 13th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government at which Edwin Carrington was inaugurated as Secretary-General. The wide-ranging recommendations from that seminal report had never escaped his attention. Neither had the skepticism of the then Heads, and, in fact, future Heads, about the main recommendation to establish a European type system of CARICOM Commissioners. Yet the record will show that his tenure is associated with many initiatives and successes included in the *Time for Action* report. In addition to the revision of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, there have been the establishment of the Caribbean Court of Justice; the Caribbean Single Market; the Caribbean Development Fund; the CARICOM Regional Negotiating Machinery (now the Office of Trade Negotiations); the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre; the Caribbean Regional Organization for Standards and Quality; the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security; the CARICOM Competition Commission; and the Caribbean Regional Institute of Translation and Information. All these, among others, have contributed in no small measure to spreading the face of the Community and sustaining the regional integration functions across various areas of benefit to the Caribbean people.

During his tenure also, the configuration of international relations changed dramatically. In response he passionately pursued the expansion of the Community’s network of which examples include: the Association of Caribbean States; relationships with the Central American Integration System; and the intensification of relations with the US, Canada, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, Japan and the UK, among others. In this regard, he also piloted the Community’s sustainable relationship with Cuba. Equally important was the passion with which he presided over Suriname and Haiti becoming full members of the Caribbean Community, as well as the incorporation of CARIFORUM into the structure of CARICOM, thereby coalescing creatively, his dual status as Secretary-General of CARICOM and CARIFORUM. His efforts at embracing the wider Caribbean were also manifested in the increasing inclusion of the newly autonomous States of the Netherlands, Aruba, Curacao, and more recently, Sint Maarten, as special members of the Community which are now

engaged in functional cooperation arrangements and which participate actively in the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD). He championed the consolidation of relationships with the UN system through an institutionalized CARICOM-UN Cooperation Forum. Most of all, expanding formal arrangements between CARICOM and Third States have resulted in a current roll call of 23 plenipotentiary ambassadorial accreditations to CARICOM. This does not include representation from CARICOM Member States.

Quite early in his first term as Secretary-General, at the 14th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government in The Bahamas, Edwin Carrington showed his hand by stating categorically that “a community, no matter how well structured, will not be able to respond adequately to the aspirations of its people - certainly not West Indian people - if it does not cater to their active and full participation”. The Charter of Civil Society, since translated into Dutch and French, was driven by his beliefs and so were the attempts to sustain the Assembly of Caribbean Community Parliamentarians (ACCP). He made CARICOM Day a meaningful landmark, at least in Guyana, by dedicating it to the elderly; the children of CARICOM Staff; and to the youth, whom he always saw as the future leaders of the Region. More lasting legacies associated with his tenure include the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQ); the CARICOM Passport; the Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV and AIDS (PANCAP); the restructuring of CARIFESTA; the Port- of-Spain Declaration: Unifying to Fight the NCDs; and the Nassau Declaration: *The Health of the Region is the Wealth of the Region*. These are all essential ingredients of regional integration that are associated with Edwin Carrington as CARICOM Secretary-General and are worth celebrating.

These attributes provide a mere snapshot of a man who brought distinction to the office of Secretary- General in more ways than one. A good anecdote for an occasion such as this is the report that our recipient has been mistaken for Sidney Poitier on several occasions. Another is his reported prowess as a fisherman who, in the presence of a Prime Minister present here today, caught a fish the length of which extended with every consequent telling of the episode and which by now may only have been prevented from being classified in the Guinness Book of Records for want of verification by the said Prime Minister. Then there is the view advocated from time immemorial that our “Carrie” had the potential to become an opening batsman in the West Indies team. That is until, as he tells it, he saw another OCC recipient, called Sir Garfield Sobers, in action! Oh, how we would have missed this occasion to celebrate, had our recipient gone on to Hollywood, or established himself in the fishing business or become a retired cricketer. It only goes to show, that in whatever manifestation, Edwin Carrington would have become a legend in his lifetime.

And there is evidence of this. He is the last recipient of the Trinity Cross, the then highest honor of Trinidad and Tobago, as well as its second highest, the Chaconia Medal,. He holds the Companion of Honour of Barbados; Order of Distinction of Belize; the Duarte, Sanchez Y Mella Gran Cruz De Plata Decoration of the Dominican Republic; the Cacique Crown of Honour of Guyana; the Order of Jamaica; the Grand Master in the Order of the Yellow Star, the highest award of Suriname; the Commander of Number of the Order of Civil Merit of the Kingdom of Spain; and the Order of Merit, Commander Class of Italy. In addition to honorary doctorates from his alma mater, UWI and from the City University of New York, he has earned several other awards of merit from institutions around the world. More recently, Antigua and Barbuda bestowed on him the Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of the Nation, the island’s highest award “in recognition of his consistent and tireless efforts to build a strong and effective Community for the people of the Caribbean and for generations to come”.

Throughout his long and distinguished career, Sir Edwin has been married to one woman, his wife Lady Patricia, who fully deserves our recognition for her role in these outstanding achievements of this Caribbean Man of letters, a champion of integration, a vibrant spirit of Caribbean civilisation. The members of staff of the CARICOM Secretariat were extremely pleased that Lady Carrington was present in Georgetown

last December to share in their warm and generous farewell to her husband who gave his soul to the advancement of the CARICOM Secretariat and to the Caribbean Community, at great sacrifice. No doubt this gathering shares similar sentiments.

Sir Edwin, we salute you. Accept, Sir, the conferment of the Order of the Caribbean Community with our deepest respect and inestimable appreciation.



30 June 2011