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The Africa-Brazil-Caribbean-Diaspora (ABCD) Commission

by

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At the Africa Center

On Monday evening, September 23, 2024 I was at the Africa Center (TAC) in the Aliko Dangote Hall in Harlem, New York, delivering the Keynote Lecture at the Official launch of the Global Africa Gateway led by the Africa Export-Import Bank (AfreximBank).

The TAC serves as a central hub for the exchange of ideas related to the African continent, deepening the world's understanding of Africa, its Diaspora, and the role of people of African descent in the world. Its leadership team includes its Board's Co-Chairs Chelsea Clinton (daughter of President Clinton) and Jendayi Frazer (former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and Distinguished Senior Professor at Carnegie Mellon University), Halima Dangote (Executive Director of the commercial operations of the Dangote Group, an African industrial conglomerate), Hadeel Ibrahim (a dedicated philanthropist and founding executive director of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation), and Chief Executive Officer, Uzodinma Iweala (Nigerian-American author and medical doctor).

On the programme for the official launch of the Global African Gateway, presenters included Aliko Dangote (Founder, Chairman and CEO of the Dangote Group; a multi-billionaire) who spoke on "The Role of the Diaspora for a Global Africa", and Professor Benedict Oramah (President of Afreximbank) who addressed "The Significance of Global African Gateway"; Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa, Deputy Chair of the African Union Commission delivered a "statement of support".

Following my keynote Address, there was a high-level panel discussion on "Integrating Global Africa in a Polarizing World". The panelists were Tidjane Thiam (Executive Chair of the Freedom Acquisition Group), Kanayo Awani (Executive Vice President, Afreximbank), and Dr. Uzodinma Iweala (CEO of the Africa Centre).

The programme for the evening also included splendid renditions by the singer Mystic Marley (Granddaughter of Bob Marley); a photographic exhibition; a celebration of African Fashion (from Ghana, Trinidad, Mozambique, Nigeria, and

South Africa); and a Gastronomy Experience (with chefs from Mauritania, Senegal, Burundi, South Africa, Somalia/USA).

The evening's Master of Ceremonies was the accomplished BBC anchor, Lisa Marie Misztak. In the audience were distinguished leaders from across the world of business, the arts and politics from Africa and the diaspora, including the Prime Ministers of the Bahamas, Grenada, Haiti, and the Director-General of the World Trade Organisation, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

AFREXIMBANK

The Afreximbank is a pan-African supranational, multilateral financial institution created in 1993 under the auspices of the African Development Bank. It is headquartered in Cairo, Egypt. It is a source of financing to African and Caribbean governments and private businesses in support of African, Caribbean and Diaspora trade. Its current assets are in excess of US \$30 billion, which are slated to double by 2030. Twelve of fourteen CARICOM member-states have signed on to participate in the Bank's operations; SVG is one of these CARICOM countries. A Caribbean headquarters of the Bank was established in Barbados one year ago. The Bank is one of the central institutions through which a deeper integration between Africa, the Caribbean and the Diaspora is to be affected.

The ABCD Commission

My keynote address on the programme was immediately preceded by the three-song performance by Mystic Marley and her group. Her third song was Bob Marley's classic "Redemption Song", which was in part a communal rendition. She invited and received full audience participation in the rendering of the lyrics. A speech after that was undeniably a hard act to follow.

In my speech, I addressed several inter-locking themes touching and concerning the integrating of "global Africa" in the world's political economy, its historical and contemporary challenges and possibilities for Africa, the Caribbean and the wider Diaspora of the peoples and countries of African descent.

In the process, I elaborated on the necessity and desirability of creating a permanent Africa-Brazil-Caribbean-Diaspora Commission to drive this integration in areas of transport (air and sea), trade, investment, migration, culture, sports, and a political nexus. I have been pushing this idea for some twenty years. We now seem to be getting there.

First, two or so years ago, at the African Union- CARICOM Summit leaders accepted the formation of an AU-CARICOM Joint Commission as a precursor to the establishment of the ABCD Commission. The contradictions and emerging opportunities, in the global political economy are accelerating the drive towards an ABCD Commission. Men and women made history but only to the extent that the circumstances of history permit them so to make.

The basic facts both pre-dispose and induce a joiner between Africa, Brazil, the Caribbean and the rest of the Diaspora: Africa is a massive landmass with abundant natural resources and a population of 1.3 billion people; Brazil the largest country in South America with huge natural resources and a population of 210 million, one-half of whom are of African descent; the Caribbean consisting of the 14-member states of CARICOM, plus Cuba and the Dominican Republic, and all other countries washed by the Caribbean Sea with significant populations of African descent (Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala) and the other areas of the African Diaspora (USA, Canada, other Latin American countries, Europe). Together Africans, persons of African descent, and allied persons in those countries total in excess of 2 billion or some one-quarter of the world's population. We need the institutional arrangements to harness the potential inherent in all this, within our people's interests.

Integration can be mechanistic or organic. It can be done in the way of machines, built and driven by external hands and minds. Or it can be organic in the sense that the strengths and weaknesses of the units become dissolved into the whole, so that the whole results in more than a summation of the individual parts; and this whole functions in the interests of all so as to ensure that there are the requisite compensatory mechanisms to avoid an unequal yoking of the less developed countries, regions and sectors. It is a complicated process, awash with contradictions, but it is a great cause with massive possibilities.

The Way Forward

The African Union-CARICOM Joint Commission must immediately set about devising an appropriate roadmap and work plan. Part of the trajectory in going forward is to get Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, all other countries washed by the Caribbean Sea, and the representatives of the African Diaspora in North America and Europe aboard. Essentially, this venture is to bring about the dream, the vision, of Marcus Mosiah Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) from the 1920s but at a much higher level in contemporary times.

While others sleep to dream; we must dream to change the world in our own interests, and for the better of humanity in peace, justice, sustainable development, prosperity and security.

The ABCD Commission can chart a better, alternative path. It is possible. The African Union, CARICOM, Afreximbank, the African Centre have important roles to play in our future.