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On May 6, 2015, the Honourable Winston Dookeran, Minister of Foreign Affairs, participated in the Forum on the Future of the Caribbean, held May 5-7, 2015, at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus and at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The forum was jointly organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the University of the West Indies along with regional and international development partners. The purpose of the forum was to catalyse change through the provision of a space for debate and rethinking of new academic and policy solutions as well as transformative ideas for refocusing Caribbean development. Prime Ministers, Ministers of Government, Heads of Regional and International Organizations, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Academics, civil society and young people from within and outside the Caribbean region participated in the three-day forum.

In his introductory keynote address on “Emerging Caribbean Space in the Global Setting of Our Times – Will the Caribbean miss this Opportunity?” delivered on Day Two of the Forum, Minister Dookeran began by expounding on an issue that is at the heart of the development problematique in the region – the challenge of leadership. In quoting two former Prime Ministers of Jamaica, P.J. Patterson and Norman Manley, he surmised that politics must not be seen as a deterrent for the advancement of the Caribbean region and that today’s politics have to be equal and responsive to the needs of the region.

Reflecting on the sustained and historical impact of globalization in the Caribbean, he referenced Kishore Mahbubani’s book “The Great Convergence”, in which the author said “deep in our guts we all know that our world has changed significantly. Indeed the world has experienced greater change in the past thirty (30) years than it did in the
previous three hundred (300). What we are struggling to find is one big idea that explains what we feel.”

The Minister reiterated his long-held view that the region’s ability to synthesize the political logic and economic logic remains the greatest challenge for the region. Noting that the political and economic logic must now go hand in hand, he drew a quote from “Why Nations Fail”, a book by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson in which the authors concluded that “it is man-made political and economic institutions that underline economic success or the lack of it.”

In the second part of his speech, the Minister focused on the macroeconomic vulnerability of Caribbean economies. He noted that contrary to the dominant views of mainstream international financial institutions upon which they have predicated their support to the region, economic shocks were not a temporary phenomenon that could be addressed by cash flow injections. Instead, they are a prominent feature of Caribbean economic history which the region has been negotiating for an extended period of time. Therefore, this necessitates a redefining of “those windows of support on the basis of the new premises and the new realization about our economic challenges.”

He further noted that the Caribbean region’s economic space must be captured by new models of intervention within a new Convergence of the Caribbean region. This he surmised will “allow us in the English-speaking CARICOM region and of course the new entrance to Haiti to move from a gross domestic product something like $70 billion to operating in a wider Caribbean Sea with a gross domestic product of $350 billion.”

He concluded his remarks by expanding on the framework of a new convergence process, with respect to institutional redundancies in the region. He highlighted the need for today’s institutions to reflect the realignment of global and political forces.
In closing, he implored the forum participants to work together to generate new thinking that would lead to relevant institutions for the next generation. END