



The World Today

Reflections on the 2007 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Uganda: Lessons for Trinidad and Tobago in 2009

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I was overwhelmed to be part of the parallel Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF) in Kampala, Uganda in mid-November for at least three reasons. First, I was a member of the Civil Society Advisory Committee to the Commonwealth Foundation which helps to organize the biennial Forums. Second, I supported the Trinidadian delegation's bid to bring the Commonwealth to Port-of-Spain in 24 months' time. And third, I was a postgraduate student at Makerere in the late-1960s and I am a visiting professor at two of Uganda's better universities who participated in the CPF, so another safari to the 'Pearl of Africa' was like going home.

At the closing ceremony of the CPF; in the presence of the Trinidad & Tobago (T&T) High Commissioner to London Glenda Morean Philip, the Director of the Foundation, Dr Mark Collins, suggested that the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is now misnamed. Rather, it is four major interrelated conferences – Business & Youth meetings as well as CHOGM & CPF – it should take its cue from the 2009 Summit of the Americas here in Port-of- Spain – are that of the Commonwealths.

Together these four global gatherings will put T&T on the world stage just before the end of the decade and bring the global agenda to Port-of-Spain: aside from suspensions of Pakistan and Fiji, emerging issues of climate change; conflicts over energy, land & water; recognition of a range of sexual orientations; debates about membership criteria etc. The Uganda CHOGM endorsed in its Munyonyo statement from the Head's retreat the report of Amartya Sen's Commission on Respect & Understanding - 'Civil Paths to Peace' – and T&T's rainbow character should be instructive for those parts of the extended family that are less respectful of diversity, including the 2011 Summit in Sri Lanka in 2011.

Many items of interest to Trinidad and the Caribbean appear in CHOGM's Communiqués – small states, trade, small arms, corruption, crime etc plus items on Belize & on Guyana – but this year, aside from supporting the ICC which Trinidad helped to create, it decided to establish a group to report in Port of Spain on the needs of small states around the reform of international institutions. Conservative interests in Canada diluted the draft 2007 Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan so how green will the Summit be here? However, the appointment of a new Secretary-General from one of the emerging

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economies (BRIC- Brazil, Russia, India and China) – is symbolic of changes in the world economy.

The Trinidadian delegation was active in all aspects of the late-2007 Summit, especially the CPF, learning about innovations to programming in Uganda, notably, a series of pre-CHOGM warm-up events, the flexible People's Space for mini-conferences and concerts and the Learning Journeys to innovative civil society centres. T&T has just inaugurated its new High Commission in Kampala headed by senior diplomat, Ambassador Patrick Edwards establishing a special relationship with East Africa and the Great Lakes Region. Both of these 'developmental states' are aspiring to become 'emerging economies' along the lines of Malaysia and Singapore as reflected in the 'Kampala Declaration on Transforming Societies to Achieve Political, Economic & Human Development'. There were also myriad side events around CHOGM & CPF, such as the launch of my new Routledge publication at the Makerere University Business School.

Trinidad and Tobago is already into the Christmas spirit and an early Carnival in the New Year. However, in less than 24 months, Trinidadian government, private sector and civil society are hosting the Commonwealth as well as Americas Summit but with what ambitions & expectations? Commonwealth Day on Monday March 10 will afford us a timely opportunity to reflect on the impacts of CHOGM in Uganda and anticipate discussions and resolutions here when we host the Commonwealth Summit(s) towards the end of 2009.

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