



**The Prime Minister
St. Vincent and the Grenadines
West Indies**

May 10, 2017

TO: HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT OF CARICOM

My Dear Colleagues Heads of State and Government,

RE: THE OAS AND VENEZUELA

There are insidious developments at the Organisation of American States (OAS) that should trouble each of us. Among these developments is the introduction of a World Trade Organisation (WTO) 'green room-type' process by which a small group of powerful states in the Organisation are seeking to impose their will on the decisions of member states. They are doing so by first settling a core position among themselves and then luring selected small states to support their stance.

As we all know, this divide and rule tactic has always been a weapon in the arsenal of a small group of powerful nations in their relations with a bigger number of weaker countries. They employ it at will.

Within the OAS of 34 member states, CARICOM with a collective vote of 14 represents a significant number because, traditionally, a two-thirds majority (or 22 votes) is required to adopt or alter substantive matters. In this regard, CARICOM, acting together, has the capacity to influence the activities of the Organisation meaningfully. Recently, however, CARICOM has diluted our strength by division amongst our member states.

A handful of powerful countries, with an agenda of naked self-interest, has strategically invited selected CARICOM countries to their meetings and ignored the others. In the result, they have succeeded in disuniting and weakening CARICOM countries whose only strength lies in our solidarity. This worrying development has been particularly manifest in matters related to Venezuela.

There is clearly a calculated strategy in place by a group of nations to achieve regime change in Venezuela by using the OAS as a weapon of destruction. Their language is cast in adherence to the principles of democracy, constitutionality and humanitarianism but behind the façade lies the sinister intent of toppling a duly-elected government that challenges their unbridled hegemony in this hemisphere. A chosen and willing tool has been the Secretary-General, Luis Almagro, who as a

/2....

May 10, 2017

Page 2

hemispheric public servant, far exceeds the authority reposed in him by governments by publicly attacking the Head of Government of Venezuela. Mr. Almagro's outrageous behaviour has not been censured by any of the powerful governments. Instead, he has been applauded by a number of them. In violation of the Charter of the OAS, both the US Executive and its Legislature have openly pressured member states to support Mr. Almagro and to condemn the elected government of Venezuela.

While these actions are focussed on Venezuela in name, it is the institutions of multilateralism and their rules that are being assaulted. As small countries that rely on multilateralism and its institutions and rules for our own protection, we should resist these assaults in our own interest.

Each of us in CARICOM may have specific concerns about the political, economic and social conditions in Venezuela but we are all sufficiently seasoned political leaders to know that toppling a government will not end those conditions, particularly when there is no viable, electable single alternative to replace it. Only disorder and disarray will result. In all this, there may be a constructive role for CARICOM to play in promoting a dialogue and helping to resolve the conflict in Venezuela. This is a matter that should engage our attention at the earliest opportunity.

In the meantime, none of our countries should allow itself to be ambushed into breaking our solidarity and aligning ourselves with fair-weather friends. The very countries that lure our nations into supporting their agenda are the ones that are neglectful of our situation and who worsen them by their actions on matters such as the withdrawal of correspondent banking relations and branding our countries as money launderers, and drugs and firearms traffickers. When they have accomplished their objectives, by breaking our solidarity through having some of us side with them, we will all be relegated to the margins of their concerns – only weaker than we were before.

In this connection, I appeal to colleagues to instruct their missions to the OAS to maintain solidarity on the basis of principles enshrined in the Charters of the United Nations and the OAS – principles that have served us well, particularly:

- Non-interference in the internal affairs of states (UN and OAS Charters);
- The Organization of American States has no powers other than those expressly conferred upon it by this Charter, none of which provisions authorises it to intervene in matters that are within the internal jurisdiction of the Member States. (Art 1, OAS Charter);

May 10, 2017

Page 3

- The promotion and consolidation of representative democracy, with due respect for the principle of non-intervention; (Art 2 b, OAS Charter);
- Respect for the personality, sovereignty, and independence of States; (Art 3 b, OAS Charter);
- No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. The foregoing principle prohibits not only armed force but also any other form of interference or attempted threat against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements. (Art 15, OAS Charter)

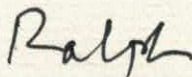
With specific regard to a proposed meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs ostensibly to consult on the situation to Venezuela, I urge that we not agree to such a meeting until: (a) the purpose of the meeting is fully understood; and (b) our governments are presented with a draft statement from such a meeting, prepared and agreed by a Committee of OAS representatives of ALL members of the Organisation in an open and transparent manner, subject to Cabinet approval. Should we agree to a meeting without a clear understanding of its outcomes, our governments will be walking into an ambush that would not serve our collective interest.

In a haste to produce a statement on Venezuela, a group of countries has proposed May 22nd for the consultation meeting – less than 2 weeks from today. This timing is too short if thoughtful attention is to be paid to a serious matter. In this regard, I ask colleagues to direct their OAS representatives to insist that the meeting be delayed to provide sufficient time for a thorough review of its outcome statement; perhaps to be held on the eve of the OAS General Assembly in June.

I commend these observations to Colleagues, and I would welcome hearing from you.

All the best to each of you, your families, your respective governments and peoples.

Sincerely yours,



Dr. The Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves
Prime Minister