

PRESENTATION

By Most Hon. P. J. Patterson ,ON, OCC, PC, QC

“Building Africa-Caribbean Solidarity

In the Age of Global Pandemic”

It is my great pleasure to launch this activity as our first public initiative in commemoration of African Unity Day and to extend our warmest congratulations and solidarity.

This occasion enables me also to fulfil my obligations as an Original Trustee of the African Union Foundation, established by a declaration at the 50th Anniversary of its formation to build linkages with its descendants on this side of the Atlantic.

I regard it as a great privilege to host this Seminar as the Statesman in Residence of the P.J.Patterson Centre for Africa-Caribbean Advocacy which was launched by the Vice Chancellor and myself just over a year ago to assist in the coordination of public advocacy around major issues affecting both regions.

Since then, our world has been beset by a series of global turmoil and turbulence beyond the experience of the elder folk and the younger generation – COVID-19, Racism, Poverty – the formidable threats of war, the dangers of climate change, genocide, the powerful tide of uncontrolled

migration by the desperation of persons to avert ethnic cleansing and natural disasters in the protection of their lives and indeed their survival.

The frequency and effects of these global turbidities come at a time when the flagrant conspiracies to dehumanize our brothers and sisters have served to broaden the scope and intensity of our work and have given the Centre an urgency of now.

After the major influenza pandemic of 1918, when the global death toll was 50 million, the world today is vastly different from the one in which even the oldest among us have known. The speed and volume of travel now make it certain that the outbreak of a virus or communicable disease is likely to trigger a spread around the world before there is a possibility of effective control and containment.

We have to fight what now seems to be a new form of medical and drug patent imperialism.

Most of us were taught that the assassination of the Archduke of Austria sparked the conflagration which ignited the first World War. In the same way, the cruel and despicable murder of George Floyd in Minnesota last year has lit the angry flame of ugly racism which has existed from the days of slavery and condemned the Continent of Africa and those of ethnic descent on the Atlantic side to economic degradation and abject poverty.

As we celebrate African Unity with the entire Continent, we cannot forget the victims who managed to survive the horrors of the Middle Passage. We must also honour the 15 million victims who perished on the way and that memory of years of trauma which people of colour everywhere have endured.

The Slavery Trade itself and colonialism have ended. However, the legacy of pain and systemic racism are still alive and thriving. Inter-racial discrimination is still flourishing and the practice of inculcating a sense of innate inferiority is still being perpetuated against people of colour in too many places.

Poverty, debt, hunger and diseases continue to increase in many of our communities and countries. Unequal access to education, health care, justice and technology are huge handicaps in the daily struggles of life.

Negatively affecting Africans and African Descendants is the scourge of violence; stymied development; fractured identities; and other severe disabilities.

It is against this background and their close inter-relationships that the P.J.Patterson Centre opted to deliberate in this Webinar the 3 Global Pandemics which we are suffering in the world of today: COVID-19, RACISM and POVERTY. They compel us to the Building of Bridges between the nations and people of Africa and the Caribbean.

In order to overcome the deficit and legacy of slavery, we must recognise the imperative to work together with unity of purpose and action. The people of Africa, the Caribbean and the African Diaspora constitute a mighty force. We must display an invincible Spirit to fight as one single army in the struggle for peace, justice, and development.

The people of Africa and its Diaspora are saying to the world: Black lives matter - everywhere and every time. The global crises, the flagrant discrimination we face impel us to be decisive and determined to confront boldly the iniquities and inequities we have suffered for far too long: **Full Time now. We can't breathe** is our universal cry.

We too are well aware of the efforts by our African and Caribbean Leaders to convene a Summit to settle a common Agenda for the short-, medium- and long-term strategy for effective interchange of knowledge, technology, intellectual research, trade, investment, culture, and sports. A physical meeting may not be feasible at this time; but if the UN can have a virtual General Assembly, we must use the available tools of modern communication. The conversation between us must be pursued. The time is now.

There is bound to be a different configuration of global power and the global economy after the post-pandemic era. Africa and the Caribbean must ensure that in the new dispensation, our collective voices are heard loudly and clearly. As sovereign nations, our vital interests must be reflected in the new world order.

We must act as one to include the voices of all African States and the Caribbean Nations in the decision of the future post-pandemic world in a

proactive and strategic fashion to ensure that our interests are advanced by sitting at the table and not in the fringes or margins. That is the only way in which our interests will be fully respected.

In today's globalized world, diplomacy has become multi-dimensional, increasingly extending beyond inter-governmental relations. Traditional diplomacy and international relations are now embedded in a complex of rapidly changing network, involving non-state actors. This is particularly the case in Africa-Caribbean relations and its global dispersed diaspora; given the important historical ties and commonality of global and development issues.

In staging this event, the P.J. Patterson Centre for Africa-Caribbean Advocacy stands ready to play its part as we examine and act together in the promotion of pragmatic and timely policy-oriented interventions on important issues requiring urgent attention and to secure optimum benefits for our future relationships.

We look forward to a meaningful dialogue as we summon the will to fight our cause with all the skills in our armoury for Peace, Justice and Human Development.

Aluta continua

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