

African Union Day 2023 Message
At AU6RC African Union Day Celebration
By Caribbean Consular Corps Chair - CG Henry Mangal

9th September 2023, Toronto City Hall, Community Rooms 3 and 4

Salutations: Chairman of the African Union 6th Region – Dr. Macaulay Kalu and his Executive, distinguished members of the Ontario Legislative Assembly; Colleague members of the Caribbean Consular Corps, other distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen.

I bring you warm greetings from the Caribbean Consular Corps on the celebration of African Union Day. The peoples of Africa and the Caribbean are inextricably linked and that is why we stand in solidarity with you on this important day. The Caribbean as we know it today, is a predominantly African civilisation and it could not have existed were it not for Africa, which was the source of captured humans extracted from their homelands and forcefully transported to the West Indies to work as enslaved and unpaid labour on colonial plantations.

The connection of the Caribbean to Africa is indisputable and Caribbean solidarity with Africa is well documented. When African countries were pursuing their independence in the 1960's and 70's, Jamaican Reggae music icons like Bob Marley and Peter Tosh lent revolutionary support to African liberation by composing songs and journeying to Africa to perform for the people of Africa. Songs like "Zimbabwe" and "Africa Unite" are timeless testimonies of Bob Marley's contribution to African liberation.

From my own small country Saint Lucia, Sir William Arthur Lewis, a revolutionary Development Economist, and the first and still the only black person to have won a Nobel prize in that discipline, proudly went to Africa to serve as Economic Advisor to the Presidents of several newly independent states including Ghana and Nigeria. In fact, Sir Arthur - whose eldest brother Stanley had settled in Ghana in 1929 - served as Ghana's first Economic Advisor under Independence President Kwame Nkrumah, and he helped draw up Ghana's first 5-Year Development Plan (1959-1963).

It is therefore an honour and a privilege to participate in this important observance of Africa Union Day 2023, and to celebrate the 24th Anniversary of the transformation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) after thirty-six (36) years, into the African Union.

As a young student leader in Saint Lucia in the mid-1980's, I remember participating in African Liberation Day rallies in Saint Lucia on May 25th, where the call was for the dismantling of the abhorrent apartheid system and the release of African National Congress (ANC) leaders like Nelson Mandela and others, who were held captive by this cruel system. Caribbean solidarity helped dismantle the apartheid system and paved the way for Mandela, the Pretoria prisoner, to ascend to the Presidency of his nation in the first majority-rule elections in South Africa in 1994.

Today, the struggle of African Union Day is for the economic unification and empowerment of the African continent, and the end of colonial and neocolonial exploitation. Your celebration today focuses on: *"Implementation of the African Free Trade Agreement"* and I salute your role in mobilizing for the African Union, and engaging the African Diaspora, to ensure its maximum participation as part of the African free trade area.

Africa is the breadbasket of the world, it is the largest continent, the richest in terms of resources, and it deserves to be in control of its own resources and its destiny. Therefore, we must work tirelessly to put an end to the divisions in Africa, many of which are being stoked by selfish external forces.

Africans and people of African descent in the Caribbean and the Americas have been psychologically traumatized, economically disadvantaged, and socially disempowered by slavery – described by the United Nations as the most atrocious crime against humanity in history, but the perpetrators and their descendants have not been held accountable or owned up for this atrocity. Token acknowledgments by members of the British Royal family and the King of the Netherlands are grossly inadequate, as the British Government and other European nations have refused to accept responsibility and pay reparations.

The Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) at their summit in July 2013, formed a Prime Ministerial Sub-Committee (PMSC) on Reparations led by the Prime Minister of Barbados, and including the leaders of Guyana, Haiti, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago.

This PMSC laid the foundation for the establishment of a CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC) - which held its first meeting in September 2013, under the Chairmanship of University of the West Indies (UWI) Professor and Pro Vice Chancellor, Sir Hilary Beckles. The CRC is supported by National Reparations Committees set up in each country to mobilize support and demand reparatory justice for our people.

In July 2023, African and Caribbean representatives joined forces in Bridgetown Barbados, to demand reparations for slavery and its legacy in the Caribbean. The demand came at a meeting hosted by the University of the West Indies with participation from the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union, and Ambassadors and Representatives from several AU member states as well as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

In cementing its ties with the African Union, CARICOM under the leadership of Prime Ministers Mia Mottley of Barbados and Gaston Browne of Antigua and Barbuda, initiated formal relations, with the first CARICOM AFRICA Summit held on 7th September 2021 in Kenya. That summit set in motion the framework for a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Air Services, Development Cooperation and Political Solidarity.

From 1st to 3rd September 2022, the inaugural AfriCaribbean Trade and Investment Forum was convened in Bridgetown, Barbados under the theme: *"One People. One Destiny. Uniting and Reimagining our Future."* The Forum welcomed over 750 delegates from Africa and the Caribbean, including government and private sector officials, investors, development partners, and trade support institutions. One of the primary objectives of this Forum was to promote and facilitate trade and investment between Africa and the Caribbean. Guyana will be hosting the second AfriCaribbean Investment Forum in their capital Georgetown from 30th to 31st October 2023, under the theme: *"Creating a Shared Prosperous Future."*

These are just some of the small but concrete steps taken by the Caribbean to assert its African-ness and the African empowerment agenda. This is an Agenda that will enhance the racial equality and ensure the economic equity that is often espoused but rarely practiced. We therefore urge all of Africa and the African Diaspora (AU6RC) in particular, to unite in solidarity and to continue pursuing this agenda until the world listens, understands and takes the appropriate action.

Happy Africa Day 2023!

I thank you.