

The President's News Conference With Caribbean Leaders in Bridgetown May 10, 1997

Prime Minister Arthur. Mr. Chairman, President of the United States of America, fellow Caribbean heads of state and government, Secretary General of CARICOM, distinguished delegates, members of the press. First, I should like to say that my wife and I are pleased that you could find it possible to come to share the residence with us. It is my pleasure to inform you that the just concluded Caribbean-United States summit has been a great success.

The signing of the Bridgetown Declaration of Principles is tangible expression of the new partnership between the Caribbean States and the Government and the people of the United States of America. Equally important is a plan of action which gives concrete expression to the commitment of the Caribbean States and the United States of America to cooperate on trade, development, finance, the environment, as well as on justice and security.

The summit has afforded our region the opportunity to present as one its perspectives on several concerns which we share with the United States of America. History and shared traditions already unite us. As technology and globalization bring us closer together, it is inevitable that meetings of this type will be necessary to share perspectives, coordinate actions, and to find solutions to common problems.

On this historic occasion, we have been able to undertake a detailed review and analysis of critical aspects of the relationship between the Caribbean nations and the United States of America. We have also been able to lay the foundations for future cooperation and consultation.

This summit is but the first step in a process of reaffirming and redefining a partnership between our two societies. We have come a long way in a short time from our first meeting at Sam Lord's castle through the meeting of the working groups and subcommittee in Tobago and St. Lucia, to a just concluded summit at Sherbourne and here at Ilaro Court.

Through these discussions, Mr. President, your Special Envoy, Mr. Richard Clark, has been a valuable and critical advocate in advancing our discussions. The need for an accessible contact between us cannot be overstated. It is

my hope that any arrangement of this type will not end with the summit activities but will continue to allow future consultations between the Governments of the Caribbean and United States to prosper.

In the preparatory stages for the summit, the States of the Caribbean have been ably represented by the Foreign Minister Ralph Maraj of Trinidad and Tobago; Foreign Minister, Mr. Rohee of Guyana; Attorney General David Simmons of Barbados; and Ambassador Richard Bernal of Jamaica. I wish to place on record as well our appreciation for the magnificent contribution of the Secretary General of CARICOM and his staff and the advisers.

Barbados is proud and honored to host this summit, the first of its kind between the Caribbean States and the Government of the United States of America. I am confident that history will recall this summit as having forged a new and a lasting bond between the people of our nations and those of the United States of America. It is in this spirit, therefore, that I now have the greatest pleasure in introducing the Prime Minister of Jamaica, the Right Honorable P.J. Patterson, Chairman of the Conference of Heads of Governments of the Caribbean Community to address you. I thank you.

Prime Minister Patterson. Presidents of the United States of America, Haiti, Suriname, and Guyana, colleague heads of government, ladies and gentlemen. In the closest of families, difficulties are bound to arise from time to time in their relationships. For those relationships to endure, it is essential that they must have the capacity from time to time to meet within the bosom of the family and to sort out whatever difficulties may have arisen.

Today is one such occasion. And as a result of the family meeting we have had among all the nations that are a part of the Caribbean, including the United States, we have agreed to chart a course that will enable us to move forward and together in the days ahead. We have discussed matters relating to democracy, development, and security, recognizing the considerable interlinkages which necessarily exist between all these important subjects.

Today we have signed the Bridgetown declaration and a plan of action which charts a course for progress and for unity and for integrated development within our region. We were very pleased at the firm and unequivocal commitment given by the President of the United States and his administration of the priority which is to be attached to the question of NAFTA parity. And we are pleased at the prospect of that legislation being presented to the consideration of the Congress of the United States and will do everything in our power to make representations that will ensure its favorable consideration and early passage.

Not surprisingly, we spent some time on the issue of bananas. And I have the authority of the Prime Minister of St. Lucia, Dr. Vaughn Lewis, to quote something he said to us today: "For many of our countries, bananas is to us what cars are to Detroit."

Here in Bridgetown, we have reaffirmed our resolve to fight crime, violence, corruption, trafficking in drugs and illegal weapons by a seamless alliance between the United States of America and the sovereign nations of the Caribbean. We cannot allow the drug cartels and international criminal organizations operating in or across our borders to threaten our democratic institutions, to pervert our system of justice, and destroy the health and well-being of our citizens, young or old.

We have also raised the need, if we are to be engaged in partnership, for there to be a process of collective evaluation and decision-making, rather than unilateral assessments. And we have established some machinery that will enable us to facilitate this.

We are committed to the notion of a trans-Caribbean community which would embrace all the countries washed by the Caribbean Sea. This we see as a major plank in the new partnership which today's summit is intended to forge between the sovereign nations of the Caribbean and the United States.

We see here in Bridgetown the opening of a new chapter, the start of a meaningful dialog. It was good for us to be here, and together we intend to do it the Caribbean way.

President Clinton. Good afternoon. Prime Minister Arthur, Prime Minister Patterson, fellow Caribbean leaders, let me begin by thanking our Barbadian hosts for their hospitality and all the leaders for their hard work in making this summit a success.

I'm honored to be here with the Secretary of State and several members of my Cabinet, as well as a distinguished delegation interested in the Caribbeans from the Congress: Congresswoman Maxine Waters, the Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus; Congressman Carlos Romero-Barceló, the delegate from Puerto Rico; and Governor Roy Schneider from the Virgin Islands.

The partnership for prosperity and security in the Caribbean that we signed today is a broad and ambitious plan of action. It can make a real difference for our people's lives and livelihoods, promoting open and fair trade, protecting the environment, strengthening education, spreading telecommunications, extending loans to small businesses, and combating international crime and drug trafficking.

Just as important as the commitments we've made is our determination to see them through with an ongoing, intensified process of Caribbean cooperation. The followup structures we've put in place, including an annual meeting among our foreign ministers and high-level working groups on justice and security and on development, finance, and the environment, will help us to turn our action plan into actions.

I want to highlight two areas where our cooperation is especially important: helping our people to thrive in the global economy and fighting crime and drugs. The move toward open and competitive trade around the world and in our hemisphere is bringing new opportunities for people to prosper. But rapid change is disruptive as well, as people struggle to acquire new skills and nations strive to compete. The United States is working to ensure that the transition to free trade in our hemisphere is fair to our Caribbean partners.

When I return to Washington, I will submit a Caribbean Basin trade enhancement act to Congress. When passed, this legislation will increase trade for all the Caribbean nations and help them to prepare to take part in a free-trade area of the Americas.

We're also committed to help the Caribbean nations diversify their economies and become more competitive. I discussed with my fellow leaders their concern for the Caribbean banana industry. In pursuing and winning our case at the World Trade Organization, our target was a discriminatory European system, not the Caribbean nations. I made it clear that as we work toward a solution with our European partners,

we will continue to support duty-free access for Caribbean bananas in the European market, and we will seek ways to promote diversification of the Caribbean economies.

When economies are strong, they can better resist the pressures of organized crime, the drugpushers, the gunrunners, the alien smugglers, the criminal gangs. But to truly conquer them, we must work together. That's why I'm pleased we've been able to conclude agreements for maritime law enforcement cooperation with more countries in the region, including most recently Jamaica and Barbados. Today the United States committed to help our Caribbean partners strengthen their fight against drug trafficking, providing aircraft and Coast Guard cutters to patrol the sky and the sea. We will participate in international negotiations to outlaw and prevent traffic in illegal arms, and we will help to establish a Caribbean institute to train investigators and prosecutors to combat money laundering so that criminals will no longer be able to scrub the fingerprints off their profits.

Working together, we can build a future of prosperity and security for our people. But the scope is broad, and a commitment is deep as the waters that link our shores.

Thank you very much.

Cuba and Caribbean-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, I wonder, first of all, if you could comment on the tone of your discussions and your reception here today, given the admitted lack of U.S. attention to the region in the past. And specifically, given the political baggage that accompanies U.S. policy toward Cuba, were the Caribbean leaders able to offer you any constructive suggestions on how you could shift your handling of Havana more from the negative to the positive? And I'd also like to extend that question to any Caribbean leader who would like to take it.

President Clinton. Well, first of all, we did not discuss Cuba. We talked about what those who are represented here could do together. And secondly, I believe that I have demonstrated my good faith and the good faith of this administration toward the Caribbean in many ways. We have already been together in Washington, right before our operation to restore democracy in Haiti. Most of us were gathered in Haiti when we celebrated that restoration. And I think it is well-known that at the time we fought for and succeeded in passing

NAFTA in Congress, I made a strong plea that we make sure that the Caribbean nations not be discriminated against.

I think we have now found a formula that will permit us to do that, that I believe has a good chance of passing in the Congress, and it is included in my budget. And so I feel quite good about the legislation I'm going to introduce, and I'm going to work hard to pass it and to establish a closer, more ongoing relations with all these nations.

Do you want one of them to reply?

Prime Minister Patterson. Our working sessions included a business session this morning, which we have just concluded, and a working lunch, to which we will now embark. There are a number of matters that could not be covered in the business session, and the opportunity of a working lunch among the heads will afford us an opportunity of discussing those subjects in the intimacy of that setting.

The views of the Caribbean leaders are well known, insofar as Cuba is concerned. Cuba is a Caribbean territory. We would like to see steps taken that would integrate Cuba fully not only in the Caribbean family but into the hemispheric family of nations. And we would certainly want to use the opportunity to indicate to the President over lunch the steps which we think would be possible to secure that objective.

Prime Minister Arthur. If I may, quickly. It should not escape your attention that this is the first-ever summit between the Government of the United States of America and the Caribbean that has ever been held on Caribbean soil. And that, in and of itself, should represent the sense of partnership that we are trying to build on matters of crucial importance to the two sets of societies. This spirit has not only been parlayed in the diplomatic sense of the word but has been constructive to the extent that it has sought to address matters of immediate consequence, as well as to lay a framework for the long-term development of the relationships between the two sets of societies.

We have approached this summit with a sense of pragmatic optimism. We do not believe that all of the concerns between our two sets of societies will be dealt with in one swoop. But we feel that the putting in place of a partnership and a mechanism for the followup of actions will allow us to be able to redress some of

the imbalances in the relationship of the past and chart new directions for the future.

Haiti

Q. In the just-signed document, partner for prosperity, the chief of states and government at the summit pledged to give priority consideration to technologies such as the Internet. President Clinton, if asked by President Preval, will your administration tangibly support a plan to link all public schools in Haiti to the Internet by the year 2004, on the 200-year anniversary of Haiti's independence?

President Clinton. Well, this is the first I have heard about this specific proposal, so I hate to answer a question "yes" when I don't know whether I can do it or not. But let me say, you may know that we are attempting to link all of our classrooms and libraries to the Internet in the United States by the year 2000, and then we want to move aggressively to try to establish those kinds of interconnections with our allies elsewhere. And I believe that with Haiti struggling to both preserve democracy and overcome economic adversity, the nation and the children would benefit immensely if that could be done.

So I would certainly be willing to try to help. If I know I can do it, I will tell you, yes, I can do it. But I haven't had time to be briefed on it. But I am very open to the suggestion, trying to help.

U.S. Arms Embargo Against Latin America and Whitewater Investigation

Q. Thank you very much, Prime Minister Arthur—Wolf Blitzer from CNN. I wonder if all of you would be interested in reacting to the open letter from Oscar Arias that was written to President Clinton while he was in Costa Rica, appealing to him not to lift the U.S. arms embargo to sell sophisticated warplanes to countries in Latin America, which is on the agenda right now.

And President Clinton, I wonder if you've made up your mind whether or not you're going to sell F-16's and other sophisticated warplanes and hardware to these countries, at a time when he says—former President Arias—that they need their money for more productive purposes as opposed to weaponry. And with the indulgence of your host, I wonder if I could ask you a parochial question. Kenneth Starr, the White-water independent counsel, at this hour is

scheduled to be delivering a speech in which he says the White House is an impediment to his investigation, and I wonder if you have any reaction to his comment. Thank you.

President Clinton. I don't object to the Prime Ministers commenting on—is this on? Now can you hear? I'll just speak up. I don't object to the Prime Ministers commenting on the arms decision, but on that I can tell you that no decision has been made yet.

The United States will not knowingly do anything that will spark a new arms race or divert funds from defense to—from nondefense to defense areas in Latin America. The real question is whether or not the armies in question, where the militaries have discussed this with our country, are going to upgrade their militaries anyway and whether it would be better in fending off future conflicts and controlling defense spending for the United States, their hemispheric partner, to be the main supplier or someone else to be the main supplier.

We have no interest in doing this for purely economic reasons, and we have no interest in promoting an arms race in Latin America. So the judgment that I'm trying to make—and I haven't received a final recommendation on it from my administration top personnel—is whether or not, given the facts in the various countries, it would be better for them and better for us and better for peace over the long run in Latin America for these airplanes essentially to be supplied by the United States as opposed to someone else.

Now, on the other issue, I think that Mr. Starr must be—I haven't seen the speech, but I think he must be referring to the eighth circuit case, the facts of which have now been made public, and I don't have anything to add to what my counsel said. I think that it's obvious that for several years now we've been quite cooperative, and we'll continue to be. The White House Counsel made his statement, and I think it's clear and self-evident what he said and why.

Would you like to say anything about the arms issue, either one of you?

Prime Minister Patterson. I would say very simply that I have participated in a gathering at the conference center a few weeks ago at which the proposal conveyed by former President Arias to President Clinton was fully discussed and endorsed. Jamaica as a government supports the appeal.

Immigration

Q. President Clinton, what guarantees can you give us here in the Caribbean that your new immigration laws won't lead to mass repatriation of illegal Caribbean immigrants in the United States?

And my second question is for Mr. Patterson. Can you tell us if you've got any assurance from the President that criminals in the United—Caribbean criminals in the United States won't be sent back home without any information being conveyed to you, without any mechanisms being put in place to deal with them when they arrive here?

President Clinton. First of all, let me point out that I believe the United States has the most generous immigration policy of any large nation in the world. Last year, over 900,000 legal immigrants were admitted to the United States.

In order to sustain a policy that generous, it also has to have some integrity. And looking at it, I suppose you could say we had two choices. We could just lower the legal immigration target dramatically to take account of all those who are entering illegally, or instead we could reward those who wait, play by the rules, and obey the law, and try to strengthen our capacity to stop illegal immigrants from coming into the country, which we propose to do by stiffening our controls primarily at the border, in the workplace, and when people get into the criminal justice system.

Now, having said that, I can assure you, as I told the leaders of the Central American countries, no one nation or region will be targeted, and there will be no mass deportations. We are increasing our capacity to deal with people we find in the workplace, at the borders, in the criminal justice system.

Finally—Prime Minister Patterson and Prime Minister Arthur might want to comment on this—I do not believe it is right for the United States to send people back to their native lands, who have been in our criminal justice system, without appropriate advance warning and notice. And I pledged to them that I would set up such a system. It is not right for us to do it otherwise.

Would you like to say something?

Prime Minister Patterson. By recognizing the right of each state to determine its policies on deportation, subject to international law, the

plan of action to which we agreed set out a number of specific measures that should be put in place. The President has referred to one of them, the provision of adequate advance notice to designated authorities prior to the deportation of anyone. We also think that adequate information should be provided regarding the persons to be deported and, of course, it must be established that the person being deported is a national of the receiving state.

Let me say very frankly why the problem is so acute. We have found in several cases people being deported who have lived in the United States not only for all their adult life, but have gone there from the days of early childhood with their entire families, and they have no family connection back in the Caribbean and no social contact to the communities to which they are being returned. And we, therefore, think if it is not to fuel the criminal problem, it is a matter that we have to address within the gambit of the cooperation to which we have pledged ourselves.

Prime Minister Arthur. I wish to add, please, that on the matter of the possible effects of U.S. law on Caribbean immigrants was a matter that was frankly discussed at our summit today. We represented the concerns of our nationals, and we have impressed on the President the need for any legislation to be applied in a manner that is not discriminatory, nor is unfair, and nor that—undue—put at risk the security and prosperity of legal immigrants in the United States of America.

And I just want to add on the second matter that as regards the matter of deportees, Barbados has managed to work out a comprehensive framework with United States of America on all matters pertaining to the fight against drugs. And I'm pleased to say that I'm advised by my Attorney General that included in that comprehensive framework is a protocol establishing the rules that will be applied in the return of Barbadians to Barbados. And we regard this as a substantial advance. And I'm also pleased that our plan of action sets out a multi-lateral approach to dealing with this potentially vexatious issue.

Immigration and Trade

Q. You promised—on every stop of this trip, including today, you have promised to try to soften the new immigration law and try to extend trade preferences. But you can't get any

of that done without congressional approval and, in the case of bananas, without cooperation with the European Union. What happens to these relationships here in Central America and in Mexico if you can't deliver on your rhetoric?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, with regard to the immigration law, the only thing that I was attempting to change in the immigration law, the congressional leadership has agreed to change. They've agreed to restore benefits to legal immigrants, which I thought was important.

We can, under the existing law, have the kind of protocols that Prime Minister Arthur discussed, where we pledge not to violate the human rights of any particular group of people, we pledge not to target any particular group, we pledge not to engage in mass deportations. That is not required under our law, nor was it contemplated.

To say that a country should and must have the capacity to enforce its immigration law is not the same thing as saying that there's going to be some huge roundup here. We just want to be able to enforce the law when we come in contact with people who have plainly violated it. So I don't agree that we need congressional cooperation there, although I believe it's consistent with what Congress intended when they passed the law.

Now, on this trade issue and on the question of getting fast-track authority from Congress, generally, I think that everyone understands, and I made it clear in our meetings, that all I could do was ask the Congress for its support, that there was opposition in both parties to expanded trade, but there was strong support in both parties to expanded trade. We've been through these arguments before in the last few years, but I would say the last time we had the debate back in '93, the American economy was not in nearly the shape it's in now and the Congress did the right thing for the future of America and the future of the Americas, and I believe it will be inclined to do so again.

Haiti

Q. My question is directed to President Clinton. To fight the high cost of living, the Government of Haiti has put in place a program of agrarian reform to provide Haitian farmers with technical means and rural credit to increase their capacity of production. I would like to know if the United States is ready to help in

realizing this agrarian reform in Haiti, because it is important for agriculture and for the people to find something to eat. That's number one.

But number two, I would like to mention that in Haiti, there is a sense of profound gratitude toward you, personally, President Clinton, and toward the U.S.A. for the role played in the restoration of constitutional order in Haiti after the military coup d'etat that overthrew the first democratically elected President of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. And following that, there were a lot of promises that gave hope to the Haitian people. But since then, except for some very limited contributions, there is a sense that the American administration, under your leadership, has not done enough to help meet the expectations and the most crucial needs of the Haitian people. My question is, what are the next steps that the United States intends to take to show that democracy can bring prosperity as promised in Haiti?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, that is a complicated question because it requires significant actions on behalf of the Haitian people as well as those around the world who wish to support Haiti.

I am going to have a meeting with President Preval later this afternoon, after lunch, and we are going to discuss that, and I will have some other examples of specific things the United States intends to do. But I can tell you that I believe that we should be involved, over the long run, in trying to help to restore the economy and to restore the environment of Haiti—without which the economy cannot be sustained—and to maintain the integrity of the democracy. So we will be working hard on all those issues within the limits of our ability to do it. We will do as much as we can. It's very important to me.

Whitewater Investigation

Q. I know you answered Wolf's [Wolf Blitzer, Cable News Network] question, but you didn't go very far, and Ken Starr really came out quite strongly today. I wonder if you have begun to take this a little bit personally. And also today he said very strongly that he believes that White House lawyers are paid by the Federal Government, they represent the Federal Government, and as such, they are duty-bound to disclose relevant information to a Federal grand jury. As President, do you agree with that? And again,

as I asked before, do you feel that this has become a little personal?

President Clinton. Well, not on my part. Perhaps on—you know, you said he's the one that came out strongly. I'm just over here doing my job in the Caribbean. [*Laughter*]

I can only say what I have said before. Chuck Ruff, whom I believe has a reputation as a lawyer of impeccable integrity and who is an expert in these kinds of processes, came to me and said that the effect of the decision would be not confined to the President, the First Lady, the Chief of Staff at the White House, any group of people, that the position that the Special Counsel was arguing for would, in effect, abolish the lawyer-client privilege between a Federal Government lawyer and a Federal employee at any level under any circumstances.

Now, the law firms in America might be ecstatic about that because it would certainly make a lot more private business for lawyers. But he came to me and said, "I cannot tell you how emphatically I believe that this case must be appealed." He said, "I'm your lawyer; I know

you haven't done anything wrong, I know you've made all the evidence available to them. This is a major constitutional question, and Mr. President, you do not have the right to go along with saying that every Federal employee in America should lose the attorney-client privilege under these circumstances if the Federal employee has a lawyer in the Federal Government." Now, that's what he said to me. I cannot enlighten you any more. If you want to know any more about it, you've got to ask him.

NOTE: The President's 145th news conference with Prime Minister Owen Arthur of Barbados and Prime Minister Percival James (P.J.) Patterson of Jamaica began at 1:33 p.m. at Prime Minister Arthur's residence, following the signing of the Bridgetown Declaration of Principles. In his remarks, President Clinton referred to Counsel to the President Charles F. Ruff and President Rene Preval of Haiti. Prime Minister Patterson referred to former President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica.

Caribbean/United States Summit: Bridgetown Declaration of Principles May 10, 1997

We, the Heads of State and Government of the Caribbean nations of Antigua and Barbuda, the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Commonwealth of Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, the Republic of Haiti, Jamaica, the Federation of St. Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Republic of Suriname and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and of the United States of America, meeting in Bridgetown, Barbados on May 10, 1997, pledge to strengthen our cooperation in responding to the challenges of the coming millennium, in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect.

2. We affirm our unswerving commitment to the norms of international law and the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Charter of the Organization of American States and our respect for the sovereignty of states, multilateral approaches, democratic

traditions, human rights, good governance, human dignity and the rule of law.

3. We recognise the heterogeneity and diversity yet shared identity of our family of nations and people bonded by historic and ethnic origins, cultural ties and affinity and close social and economic links. We remain appreciative of the significant contribution of our respective nationals as immigrant communities to the development of each other's societies.

4. We also recognise the inextricable link between trade, economic development, security and prosperity in our societies. We therefore declare our intention to act in concert to improve the economic well-being and security of all our citizens, to defend and strengthen our democratic institutions and to provide for social justice and stability.

5. As we enter a new century marked by rapid expansion and globalisation of finance and investment, production and commerce, driven by revolutionary developments in technology, we acknowledge the need for a new era in our