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23rd Dr Eric Williams Memorial Lecture

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad

'We Shall Not Lose The World'

Prime Minister and Mrs Manning, Governor Ewart Williams, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I feel honoured to stand before such an audience from Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean and the Commonwealth.

Many of you would have known Eric Williams in person, while others of us know him by reputation. 'The Father of the Nation.' 'Doctor Politics.'

I have a suspicion that he has an ear cocked in our direction even now, perhaps from the celestial library, where he sits, penning a critique of Selwyn Ryan's latest – monumental – biography. It is simply my hope that he bears with me all the way through this evening, rather than switching off his hearing aid, as was apparently his custom when you could not keep his attention, and closing his eyes behind those famous sun-glasses...

What would he say if he were with us tonight, as he looked upon the precarious world of May 2009? Would his great dictum that you '*Pay As You Earn*' speak to our current financial crisis? If only they had paid as they earned – '*The Doc Say So!*'

One way or another, we are in admiration of this man and in his debt, and it is for this reason that – year on year – this event is run in his name.

I read Eric Williams' classic, *Capitalism and Slavery*, some time ago and lately, *Forged from the Love of Liberty*, the range of wisdom in which gives us a glimpse of this giant of political culture.

Opinions still wrestle on the arguments that Williams put forward, but one thing is clear. *Capitalism and Slavery* was a colossal achievement, well ahead of its time. To have gone to the heart of the British establishment in 1930s Oxford as an 'Island Scholar'; to have taken a 1st Class Honours degree in Modern History; and to have produced this PhD thesis just three years later, challenging a century of British historiography. This establishes Williams firmly in the great pantheon of Caribbean and global intellect. It is a work which both changes and deepens your understanding of history and the world. It also challenges you to shape a future of which historians will write differently.

Who can argue against his own reflection that, I quote, '*those who have been passive agents of a history made and written for us by other people*'...now begin...'to write their own history, and to keep it in the democratic tradition'.

He had a truly exceptional mind – a mind which was attuned to the good of his people and of the world. He exemplified a great Commonwealth strength – your history may root you in a small part of the world, but you can still be a world citizen.

For the theme of my observations, I took the line that he gave the world in the wake of the Apollo 11 lunar landing. Williams declared to NASA that: '***It is our earnest hope for mankind that while we gain the moon, we shall not lose the world.***' I understand that the message remains pinned to the surface of the moon to this day.

'*We shall not lose the world*' ... Those words allow me to talk of what should be an achieving and fulfilling world – a world which (with further lunar reference) has taken 'giant steps for mankind' – overcoming a fractured world, a threatened world: a world that needs to think again; one in which some of our Commonwealth prescriptions or remedies are, I believe, very much in tune with the world view and vision of Eric Williams.

Eric Williams was a citizen of this country; of the Caribbean; of the Commonwealth; of the world. As such, he had a national, a regional and a global view – and a way of appreciating both the individual and the larger community. Many of the things I would like to say today revolve around the same beliefs, which we bring to bear at both levels. Because first, as he said, there is 'Mother Trinidad'. But beyond that, there is something we might call 'Mother World'. It is in our collectiveness and connectedness, linked to our individualities, that we shall save, and not lose, the world.

A changed world, for better and worse – might we lose it?

The world has changed beyond all recognition – whether since 1949, when the British Commonwealth died and the Modern Commonwealth was born; or since 1962, when British Trinidad and Tobago died, and an independent Trinidad and Tobago was born.

In some ways, it has become smaller and connected. In other ways, it shows alarming disparities between societies and their prospects, and cultural polarisation, which belie a consolidating world.

The polarity of East and West, which was the defining feature of global politics for our generation vanished in a dramatic historical collapse. It has been observed that it was not so much that the Soviet Union was not ready for Star Wars as that it was not ready for the 21st Century. Those that choose to become a dinosaur must fear for climate change. We have apparently been navigating our way from a bipolar to a unipolar to a multipolar world when it may be closer to the truth – as also observed – that we are now in a non-polar world.

Similarly, the polarity of North and South is evaporating before our eyes. North is no longer geography; it is an ability. The global manufacturing and service economies have lost their traditional contours and have disseminated globally.

The four geographical markers of East and West, and North and South have therefore fallen to a world with weakening boundaries. There are other motors of global flux. Death of time and death of distance go hand-in-hand. E-business, e-health, e-education, e-governance herald a world of remote solutions. Another enzyme of change is the role of non-state actors. The media, business and civil society now have an insistent voice and material impact in the way our world is run.

We talk of a globalising world: it might be closer to being described as a compacting world. A compacting and contracting world which is integrating in some parts, but colliding in others. The globalisation which is taking place is globalisation both of the wholesome, and the unwholesome; the civil and the uncivil society. The global society today no longer possesses the rigid borders of political and social communities as in the past.

In so many ways, this changing world is for the better. For instance, young people growing up in 2009 know spectacular benefits in health and education. The World Bank tells us that half a billion people worldwide have been lifted out of poverty since the early 1980s, and nearly two billion more children have gone through primary school since the early '90s.

While these two facts alone should give us hope for a brighter future, the dark side is not far. There are also roll-calls of ruin, and shocking figures of poverty, deprivation and disease which need not be repeated. Add to them the global vulnerability of a World Bank estimation of 50 chronically fragile states, accounting for one third of global poverty. This darker picture mocks the talk of a new world order.

The world has scarcely been able to absorb rapid serial shocks. We currently have a financial crisis, with colossal destruction of assets in the developing world which had no hand in it. Vast populations slip back into poverty and under-nourishment.

But we are also in a food security crisis, and energy crisis and a population crisis, and the mother of all crises – the environmental one – which threatens our entire habitats and sustenance from water, land and air. We in the Commonwealth see climate change in a multitude of ways, but never more than in places like The Maldives and Kiribati, threatened literally with inundation. The tides have already risen; wholesale migration is mooted as a prospect for saving the people. Our front lines are not in imminent threat: they have already been breached. Typically, such countries – with zero or almost-zero carbon footprints – are fighting for sheer survival. Thus have small countries frequently experienced vulnerability, now an existential one. Should the Commonwealth not shake world opinion against such iniquity?

Perhaps this makes clear why the Commonwealth Secretariat and the host government in Trinidad and Tobago are united that, when Commonwealth Heads of Government meet here in Port of Spain in November, they will be in crisis mode, reflecting the times we live in, and addressing the challenges posed to the small and vulnerable.

***Three ways to save the world –
protecting our values, protecting the vulnerable, protecting our variety***

What can the Commonwealth's contribution be in these times out of joint? I would like to offer some ideas around three issues which are central to our vision for the world we want to save, not lose. They are at the heart of the Commonwealth, and I believe they would ring true to Eric Williams.

I speak of what we must do for three Vs, or Verities if you like: our values, our vulnerable, and our variety.

Values

First, values. The idea of sustainability in the post-Cold War era is now increasingly linked to a consideration of sustainable values. These are not necessarily new: they just need to be newly recognised and asserted. They are those of democracy, respect for the individual, and the rule of law. They have national, regional and global dimensions and dependencies.

The values that nourish sustainability nationally are people-centred and responsive, and test the success of national advance by a benchmarking of inalienable freedoms, as well as of economic growth. The social and economic agendas are joined at the hip. A major finding of the Growth Commission set up by the World Bank was that the one common feature of all developing countries that registered spectacular economic growth over decades was heavy investment in health and education.

Recent decades have shown the value of enlightened regionalism. Individual member states are the beneficiaries when the whole region gets lifted in terms of material prospects and adherence to shared values. The CARICOM is an example of this. But in an interdependent world, national or regional striving has to be underpinned by various forms of global supportiveness through institutions and by member states for permanent and continuing gains and collective coherence.

With its gift for relevance, the Commonwealth's leaders moved quickly with the demise of the Cold War to give themselves irreducible value benchmarks known as the Harare Principles, and elaborated them further through the peer scrutiny mechanism of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group at Millbrook; the commitment to the separation of powers known as the Latimer House Principles; and the extension of these democratic principles to the grassroots known as the Aberdeen Principles. This was a pioneering cluster of ethical commitments to good governance which makes the Commonwealth a leading global exemplar of a values-based organisation.

The Commonwealth advances its goals nationally and regionally as a trusted partner and globally through robust advocacy of the goal of inclusiveness on the one hand, and principles of legitimacy, representativeness, flexibility, responsiveness, accountability, transparency and effectiveness on the other.

These should be the essential yardstick for creating and managing reformed global institutions, just as they should inform all aspects of national and local government. Can we advocate democracy at the national level but not at the global level? It is in the pursuit of these principles that we have recently been so active in the global arena in respect of international financial institutions, trade and the environment, and have made our perspectives count.

I do talk hopefully of a new internationalism built on collective values. Our interdependence means that our every success, our every failure, is shared. In a globalised world, the good things – like trade and investment, and ideas, and culture and travel – and the bad things – like disease, narcotics, and crime – cross borders with impunity. The new global community is inherently ‘one’: it can only be rebuilt as a community of values.

The Commonwealth itself is a society of values. They are set in stone; and when they are egregiously flouted, we defend them. To that end, we have a representative group of nine Foreign Ministers who come together as a monitoring and action group. They have addressed eight cases of individual members’ derogations from our values and principles since the group was formed 14 years ago, with suspension from membership being their sanction but also always working constructively to restore full membership. In keeping with this Commonwealth ethos, all have returned. Only Fiji currently remains suspended from our councils, while Zimbabwe chose to walk away.

When it comes to its values, to use a team sport metaphor, the Commonwealth is less referee and more coach. If and when it censures, it does so with a view to removing the derogation, with the stated intent to act as a trusted partner, to return the country in question to the paths of democracy and full Commonwealth membership.

When values are once established, they can be replicated elsewhere. That is why the Commonwealth can take ample credit for the way that other regional groupings have established benchmarks – like NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanism, or the Biketawa Principles in the Pacific. The Commonwealth membership of CARICOM has no doubt animated its aspirational goals. This makes the Commonwealth example a force for global good.

Eric Williams understood the primacy of values, in domestic, regional and international affairs. This may explain his role as a peace-maker and negotiator. It was evident in the free press that grew up in this country – some of it eventually directed against him, even – once – from the Mighty Sparrow himself, with ‘*No, Doctor, No*’. It is evident in Williams’ Representation of the People Bill of 1961, aiming to modernise - and democratise - the voting system in this country. This makes him a pioneer in the Commonwealth, and a precursor and practitioner of its value precepts.

Vulnerability

If the first ingredient of the new world order must be belief in shared values, its second must be its concern for the vulnerable.

The Commonwealth has a particular and defining commitment to its small and vulnerable states. It is home to 26 small states of less than 1.5 million people, and 14 Least Developed Countries.

It initiated the very science of the small state and the vulnerable state, enlisting the World Bank as its partner. It also stirred global concern for the heavily indebted, advancing the self-evident proposition that sustained development and unsustainable debt overhang cannot go hand-in-hand, and through HIPC enlisted the IMF as its partner. The Commonwealth debt management and recording software is the leading global product in the field.

It has produced ground-breaking research into small states – bringing out their unique vulnerabilities, often born of limited resources and limited options, as well as their unique resilience. It has worked tirelessly with small states, especially helping them negotiate positions on trade and climate, and charting ways to diversify their economies.

Its uniqueness is that it gives its small states their place in the sun: 10,000-strong Tuvalu has as much voice in our councils, as billion-plus India. This is global democracy in action. Small states should justly be the subject of global concern. They have the least cushion to negotiate the vicissitudes of the global economy and climate change.

Trinidad and Tobago is, of course, a representative of the small state. Eric Williams fought passionately for its self-determination, and told this nation that no matter how small it was, it could still stand proud.

And *within* small and vulnerable – and indeed all – states, who are the small and vulnerable people? All over the world, they tend to be women and young people.

I believe women are the litmus test of any society: *their* fortunes determine *its* fortunes. And yet it is abundantly clear that half of the Commonwealth bears considerably more than half of its problems: a full two-thirds of its citizens in poverty are women; as are two-thirds of its children out of school, particularly disadvantaging the girl child; and two-thirds of its citizens with HIV/AIDS. This is a litany of the most poignant and outrageous vulnerability.

The same test should be true for its young people – the inheritors of its future. We are a young Commonwealth: half of us, not far short of a billion people, are under 25. And yet young people – who will live through most of this century and will need to find answers and solutions to its fateful dilemmas – are routinely disenfranchised, under-equipped, under-appreciated, shorn of self-belief.

Throughout the Commonwealth, women and young people should be our special charge. Our belief is that they should be what we call 'mainstreamed' into precisely every strand of national life and government activity – with policies and budgets attached. All sections of society – administration, civil society, trade, industry – should pull together in a coherent and committed national endeavour.

Eric Williams thought the same about youth. Perhaps there was no greater legacy to this country than his mission to make education available for all. One of my colleagues in the Commonwealth Secretariat, a national of this country, simply said, "He is the reason why I am who I am." I read in the Eric Williams display in the University of the West Indies that he – somewhat provocatively – exhorted children to educate their parents!

It was he who fought the church monopoly on schools, to increase access by starting the process to make places available to every child in this country. He supported an expansion of scholarships and book grants. His was the line to children of these islands, that '*you carry the future of Trinidad and Tobago in your school bags*'. So many people in early 21st century Trinidad and Tobago – women in public life, especially – bear testimony to this. And aptly, the Mighty Sparrow had something to say in support of the Doctor: "*Children go to school and learn well // Other wise, later on in life, yuh go catch real hell*".

Variety

My third V to save the world is Variety.

Variety: partnership abroad

The Commonwealth's call is to hear and air the views of all. It is the embodiment of enlightened multilateralism – a multilateralism that is often strenuous to achieve, but which is achieved by representing the will of all. Its methods are those of consensus. It has the moral authority to think this, since it is home to countries rich and poor and large and small, from all continents, and gives them equal time.

The power of its collective voice and collective spirit is eminently demonstrable.

In 2005, its leaders pioneeringly decreed as one that rich countries should give more than they receive in the Doha Round of world trade negotiations.

Last month, in April 2009, it was an active player in the margins of the G20 Summit. The Commonwealth said that while 90% of the world's GDP sat around that table, 90% of its countries were away from it. We made it clear that – for all the richer countries' pain – it was the *poorer* countries and *their* people who are the collateral damage of this global crisis. The Commonwealth said that a financial crisis of the developed world should not morph into an economic catastrophe in the developing world.

The G20 in London, we believe, was not deaf to the call of the 'G172': it needed to show that we are a world coming together, not a world coming apart.

In my view, it was the Commonwealth which first introduced the idea of an international community with a founding document in which the original eight members declared that they remained, I quote, '*united as free and equal members ..., freely co-operating in the pursuit of peace, liberty and progress*'. These eight represented the first encounter between the old and the emerging worlds to forge a new one.

We remain the truest modern incarnation of an international community.

Eric Williams, too, was a world citizen and internationalist.

It was he, at the 1962 Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference in London, who stood apart among his peers in supporting the British application to join the European Economic Community. In so being, he was open to the possibilities for a self-assured Trinidad and Tobago, of relationships both with Britain and with the continental Europeans.

He campaigned for the West Indian Federation, with a plea for unity which defied mathematics and – at that time – the realities of pride: '*one from ten makes zero*', he said. His party, the PNM, has consistently worked for Caribbean integration. I recall the words which Prime Minister Manning spoke to the 27th CARICOM Summit in St Kitts three years ago. '*To follow the West Indies cricket team doth not a West Indian make...*' he said, before continuing, '*But I must say it goes a very long way.*'

Williams was open, too, to Africa. As former President Festus Mogae said in one of these lectures, Trinidadian expertise was instrumental in the creation of a modern, efficient, prosperous Botswana.

Williams' careful Cold War middle path between the US and the USSR and its near-neighbour Cuba was based, too, on the notions of international law and the value of an international community. Whether leading marches to Chaguaramas to reclaim it for its rightful owners, or cautioning against over-reliance of neighbours on powerful countries, he spoke of a new, respectful, international spirit.

It can be argued that Eric Williams can be seen as the direct precursor of the conversational spirit - the 'conversation among equals' - that US President Barack Obama supported here recently at the OAS Summit.

Variety: partnership at home

The spirit of variety, diversity and inclusiveness, of course, begins at home.

Like several other Commonwealth countries – I think of Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa, Uganda, Guyana in particular – Trinidad and Tobago has worked hard to make the confluence of Indian and African heritage, as well as Chinese and European heritage, a happy one.

This togetherness and sense of community in diversity is at the core of the Commonwealth as an association of governments and of peoples. '*The Commonwealth makes the world safe for diversity*', said Nelson Mandela in 1994, when he brought South Africa back into the association.

That diversity has its strains, and – in the wake of 9/11 – we set about looking at them. We set up a Commission chaired by Amartya Sen, with Rex Nettleford of Jamaica its Caribbean member. Your own government generously supported us. The result was *Civil Paths to Peace*, a volume of research which has won plaudits worldwide. In many ways, it was previewed in this very Eric Williams lecture, when Amartya Sen addressed you on the subject of 'identity and justice' in 2001.

In essence, the report said three things. First, that we have 'multiple identities': people should not be obliged to live, feel or act out 'singular' identities. Second, that humiliation is to grievance what salt is to wounds: it adds insult to injury for oppressed people, leading to frustration and violence. Third, that ethnic or religious identities are rarely the root causes of conflict: people basically fight to wrest empowerment or maintain hegemony.

Civil Paths to Peace implies that these are the opposite of *military* paths. The report looked closest at four key areas: crucibles of debate, the anvils on which societies are forged. These are: young people, women, education and the media. And our current Commonwealth task is to give examples of how these areas can be addressed, and will be yet.

Conclusion

So in drawing to a close, I am tempted to wonder out loud what will come out of that Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting here in Port of Spain in November.

Prime Minister Manning has challenged us with examining how we can forge a creative and consequential 'partnership for a more equitable and sustainable future'. The background now is one of crisis – the unhappy combination of crises that may well provide a far darker backdrop to the summit than ever could the Northern Range behind the Queen's Park Oval. But some breezes may also have started to stir, lifting some clouds. In any event, it will be a challenge to our ability to show solidarity and forge a collective vision – happily a brand strength of the Commonwealth.

I feel confident that we will strengthen our capacity for *Variety* in Port-of-Spain, by, for instance, sharing the ideas that will form the practical sequel to *Civil Paths to Peace*.

We will strengthen the primacy of *Values* in Port-of-Spain, by, for instance, reviewing our fundamental Commonwealth principles and their application. I hope that by that stage we will also have advanced in creating an Commonwealth alliance of election commissioners.

We will strengthen our support for the *Vulnerable* in Port-of-Spain, by, for instance, calling for a deal in Copenhagen a week later, which favours the poorer, the smaller, the environmentally friendly states.

And we shall redefine the call of partnership in the twenty first century, because we now sit in the debris of an older world, seeking to create a new one.

With shared values...

With a shared commitment to our most vulnerable...

With the diversity and inclusiveness that comes with variety...

...‘we shall not lose the world’.

I end with thanks to Eric Williams, because it was he who in 1964 – along with some leaders of Africa – proposed the creation of the executive arm of the Commonwealth: the Commonwealth Secretariat. But for that, someone else may have been addressing you right now.

One of my predecessors, the first Secretary-General, Arnold Smith of Canada, summarised some of Williams’ views of the Commonwealth at that time, when he wrote: ‘*The weakness of the Commonwealth in international affairs, Dr Williams suggested, was that too many people thought of it as a club, congenial but disorganised.*’

Now, I’d say *congenial* – yes – but not, I hope today, so *disorganised*. As actors carrying an historic responsibility in the great dramas unfolding in the first decade of the 21st Century, we shall not – and cannot afford to – lose the world. And I am sure you would agree with me that we have support from On High, because ‘*The Doc Say So*’.

ENDS