

Speeches

Opening Remarks by the Honourable Billie A. Miller, M.P. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, At the Official Opening of the New Offices of The Consulate General of Barbados at Miami

Friday 18th June 1999

Prime Minister Arthur, Consul General Ben Martinez and Mrs. Martinez, Ambassador Sir Courtney Blackman and Mrs. Blackman, Mayor of Coral Gables, Very Reverend Griffith and Mrs. Griffith, Excellencies, staff of the Consulate General and other visiting Barbados Government Officials, Barbadians, and friends of Barbados.

It is a great pleasure for me to have been able to join Consul General Martinez and his team to participate in the formal inauguration of the new offices of the Consulate General of Barbados in Miami.

It is a special privilege for us also to have Prime Minister Arthur here with us in Miami to share in the occasion. We are both on our way back to Barbados after a highly successful State Visit to Cuba, the first ever paid by a Barbadian Head of Government, and one which produced far-reaching results for both sides. The Prime Minister's dialogue with President Castro was fruitful and constructive, and we have made significant advances, through the conclusion of a Bilateral Double Taxation Treaty, to create a structured framework for doing business with Cuba.

By his presence here today the Prime Minister has clearly demonstrated the importance he attaches to the work of the Consulate General in this strategic location, and the determination of his Administration to equip this office with the resources and facilities it needs to carry out its mandate.

From its origins in the 80's as a one man Honorary Consulate, the Consulate General at Miami has grown into a fully-fledged Overseas Mission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, capable of providing the complete range of consular services to its clientele, and specially trained in the equally important task of promoting the economic and commercial interests of Barbados, with special emphasis on tourism, investment and financial services.

The Miami Consulate General has also been the pioneer of the Country Team approach. Simply put, the Country Team is the umbrella under which the sectors responsible for the implementation of the Government's economic, social and cultural development policies coordinate their efforts. This coordination is especially critical in an overseas environment where consular functions are closely inter-related with those of economic and commercial promotion, and where officers must be capable of responding simultaneously to the broad range of demands from a sophisticated clientele.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade I am extremely proud of the Miami Country Team Leader, Consul General Martinez, and his capable Team. The Miami operations are a model which I am determined that all our Overseas Missions must emulate. Here staff of the Foreign Service, the Barbados Tourism Authority, and the Barbados Investment and Development Corporation work side by side in a harmonious and cooperative atmosphere to promote the interests of Barbados. We are well served by their efforts.

The Miami Consulate has jurisdiction over Florida and ten other southern states. Its move to larger premises will allow for the expansion of its operations to service its diverse clientele throughout its extensive jurisdiction. The move is also in response to an obvious reality: the growth of greater Miami as an important business hub of the southern United States. Miami is now a thriving centre of commercial activity in the south, and as such it presents real opportunities for Barbados which we

can and must learn to exploit. It is a crossroads between North and South America and an important transit and transshipment point for tourism and business traffic. It will also serve for the next few years as the Secretariat for FTAA negotiating activities. It is therefore a logical focal point for Barbados in its efforts to capitalize on the emerging business opportunities of this fast-growing sector of the USA as well as to establish linkages with commercial interests from Central and South America which are well represented in the Miami hub.

Much has been delivered by Consul General Martinez and his staff, and much more is expected of them. I am therefore pleased today to be able to announce that in order to support these efforts, the Prime Minister has given approval for the phased expansion of the staffing complement at Miami over the next two years.

There is much more that I could say about our vision for the Miami Consulate as a flagship for Barbados business interests in the United States. Happily, however, present company determines that there is no need for me to do so. For we have with us this evening the one who most passionately articulates that vision, and who most clearly understands the need to reposition Barbados to take advantage of the new global economic realities. It is therefore a distinct pleasure and honour for me at this stage to introduce to you the Prime Minister of Barbados, the Rt. Hon Owen Arthur, and to give you the unique opportunity to hear directly from him.