

SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE
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AFFAIRS AND ATTORNEY GENERAL AT THE CLOSING SESSION

We in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas have been honoured to host this Commonwealth Caribbean Regional Seminar/Workshop on Low-Cost Science Equipment to which the response has been most encouraging in that fourteen territories have sent delegates.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has organized this seminar as part of its efforts to assist Commonwealth countries to make science teaching more effective and less costly through the use of simple equipment that can be made locally and within the region.

The importance of science education in the world today cannot be over-emphasized, and it is presumed that the Commonwealth Caribbean governments would wish to have their science programmes expanded and made more effective.

Having regard to what I understand has been stated by the delegates and by the Seminar Director, Dr. S.J. Cookey, the need for the teaching of science in all schools has been stressed both in the country papers and in the deliberations of the Seminar. It would seem that the activities of these past ten days have contributed much in helping to raise the comparatively low priority level of science in educational systems to a level befitting the scientific and technological era in which we live. In order to achieve social and economic development, a country must have a good foundation in Science but the theoretic teaching of the subject, which perhaps has been too often the case, cannot produce technicians and technologists.

I believe that such development can only take place by the application of scientific and technological techniques in industry, in agriculture and in fisheries to enable all our countries to develop the heretofore unexploited, inadequately exploited or improperly exploited land and natural resources which we possess.

It is an economic fact of life, which is not peculiar to those of us who belong to small states in this region, that there are constraints upon development in states which have limited land resources, limited water resources and lack large consumer markets. We must therefore be constantly mindful of all the factors that affect our economic viability. Politicians and planners are therefore faced with problems.

How far, for example, are physically powerless states free to restructure their economies without interference from external forces? Can they survive as entities in their own right instead of being regarded as client states with varying degrees of dependence on metropolitan governments or interests? Can such states be self-sustaining? Can their economies meet the basic needs of their populations? Can their economies provide efficient job opportunities?

Answers have to be found with your assistance; answers which are consistent with the maintenance of national sovereignty and independence. I draw attention to these considerations because it is in their context that meetings such as yours have meaning.

The purpose of this Seminar/Workshop, as I understand it, was to provide an opportunity for participants to exchange views and information on the matter of the provision of equipment in Commonwealth Caribbean territories and to come up with some practical solutions. I am led to believe that you have achieved your task to some degree, for although it may not be possible to come up with answers to all the problems the opportunity has been given to grapple with them. The results of your deliberations are embodied in your report, and as you return to your respective countries the onus is upon you to ensure that your governments receive adequate and relevant information to support the efforts of this Seminar. One of the recommendations is that governments should be requested to give support and approval to programmes relating to the teaching of science in a number of ways, among them being the establishment and strengthening of national curriculum units which might assist in the production of school science curricula. A second is that they should undertake feasibility studies with regard to the production of equipment both at local and regional level to support such curricula. Other aspects to be considered under government action would be the allocation of adequate funds for equipment and for the training of personnel to produce equipment and the training of teachers in the use of whatever is produced.

In a seminar of this nature, when so many territories are represented, aspects of regional co-operation are topical. I understand that in your deliberations the need for regional co-operation has been recognized and that it could take the form of exchanging information. The co-operation might be bilateral, sub-regional or regional. The important point is that inter-Caribbean communication has been set in motion, and the task ahead is to pursue action at all possible levels. As a result of co-operative efforts, groups of territories may feel that they can readily formulate plans for the execution of specific projects based on recommendations of this Seminar.

I wish to touch upon the question of the feasibility of producing low-cost science equipment. I have been informed that some matters of concern which arose from this seminar were the high cost of purchasing production equipment because of the small market in the area and the ultimate goal establishing regional production units which would produce equipment in the quantity required. Certain difficulties have been recognized such as: (a) Customs duty on goods imported from other countries within the region; (b) The high cost of transportation; (c) Lack of agreed curriculum for primary science teaching. In this respect, I would suggest that it might be helpful if the Education desk of the CARICOM Secretariat could serve as a clearing-house of information on science teaching as well as general education.

I take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Commonwealth Secretariat for having arranged this Seminar for the Commonwealth Caribbean. I understand that this is the first in a series of seminars relating to the teaching of science, and we are all the more pleased that the Commonwealth of the Bahamas has been chosen as the venue. As the Ministry of External Affairs of the Bahamas is charged with the responsibility of co-ordinating technical assistance from external bodies, I would also like to express the Government's appreciation for the significant assistance in broadening the range of areas being provided to the Bahamas and other Commonwealth countries through the Commonwealth Secretariat.