

The following letter was sent by Sir Shridath Ramphal, former Secretary General of the Commonwealth and former Head of the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM) to every CARICOM Head of Government prior to the 29th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government held in Antigua, July 2-4 2008.

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Letter to CARICOM Heads of Government from Shridath Ramphal.

I am writing you and your colleagues at what I believe to be a specially critical moment for CARICOM. Please excuse the intrusion; but I feel I would not be true to myself or to you, if I did not write to you now.

I know that you have reservations about the EPA. It could not be otherwise. So do many West Indians – at all levels. The difference is that you have the responsibility for going forward or pulling back. But I want to suggest that those are not the only options. There is enough disquiet about the ‘full’ EPA for Europe to understand a decision by CARICOM to pause before the next step. Europe knows well the necessity for pause; it has just endured it over the European ‘Constitution’ - to the benefit of the Union.

We too need time: time for further review and consultation – at home, within CARICOM, and with our ACP Partners. It would be a decision that does not prejudge a decision to go forward - and it must say so, for technical as well as political reasons. But, to be credible, it is a decision that must also be accompanied by other time-bound decisions: Consultations at home for those who have not done so adequately, consultations in CARICOM about the possible consequences for our integration movement which we have hardly thought about; and consultations with ACP partners with whom we are on the point of breaking ranks. Enough is at stake to justify our ‘treading water’ until we are sure of the currents ahead.

We are not sure at this moment; no West Indian is sure. At one extreme is the possibility of opportunity for some; at the other is the possibility of fracturing CARICOM, and the decades of solidarity with the ACP and the G77 which we need to retain as the North-South debate resumes. The EPA is not our sole ambition, or our sole need. It has to be compatible with all our other interests; and it is that compatibility of which we need to assure ourselves, especially as trustees for the future.

With deep respect,

1 July, 2008..