

Caribbean Coalition for Cultural Diversity Formed

November 24, 2009—Port of Spain—A Caribbean Coalition for Cultural Diversity has been established to advocate cultural positions of the region relating to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005).

Creation of the Caribbean CCD was announced during the creativity and innovation assembly of the Commonwealth People's Forum taking place on the eve of Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting (CHOGM) next weekend.

“Initially, the Coalition will focus on mobilizing the cultural sector across the region to advocate that governments that have not yet done so ratify the 2005 UNESCO Convention,” said Media, Cultural and Literary Consultant who presented research on the applicability of the UNESCO Convention to the Caribbean. Worldwide, some 103 States have ratified, but in the English-speaking Caribbean so far only Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines have done so. Trinidad and Tobago has not yet ratified and there is an active cultural lobby to have the T&T Government do so. St. Lucia sits on the Intergovernmental Committee that is now working on implementing the Convention.

A nucleus of seven cultural organizations from the region have come together to launch the coalition, with the intention of quickly reaching out to their colleagues across the region from the sectors of books, music, drama, television, film and new media.

The founding organizations are Barbados's Copyright Society of Composers, Authors & Publishers, Inc. (COSCAP); Grenada Musicians Association (GMA); the Grenada Drum Festival Committee; Dominica's Association of Music Professionals (AMP); St. Lucia's Professionals in Action for Creative Enterprise (PACE); the Eastern Caribbean Collective Organization for Music Rights (ECCO) Inc.; the St. Kitts, Nevis Association of Artists and Performers (SNAAP); and the Network of NGOs of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women.

More broadly, the mission of the coalition will be to identify and advocate shared positions regarding policy and other measures to strengthen the cultural sectors of the region, and to also promote and strengthen Caribbean cultural interests and capacities at the national and regional levels.

Among some of the initial mutual cultural concerns identified were the needs for measures, including broadcast regulations, to promote local content; excessively high customs duties and tariffs on materials used in cultural creation and production; piracy and copyright issues, and a general lack of public awareness and appreciation of newer dynamics within the global cultural arena.

Adopted in October of 2005 by a landslide vote at UNESCO's General Conference, the Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions recognizes the distinctive nature of cultural goods and services as essential transmitters of values, identity and meaning—over and above their commercial dimension; for this reason, it affirms the sovereign right of States to apply policies and other measures in support of their domestic cultural sectors.

The Coalition emphasized that ratification of the UNESCO Convention should mark the beginning of a process, not the end, by setting the stage for a discussion involving Caribbean States and cultural organizations about concrete actions to strengthen and promote the cultural industries of the region. And it emphasized the importance of States upholding their right to apply cultural policies when culture is discussed in other forums—notably by resisting commitments in trade negotiations that could limit their ability to apply such policies.

The Caribbean Coalition will also join the International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity (IFCCD), which brings together more than 40 other similar national coalitions for cultural diversity, representing more than 600 organizations of artists and other cultural practitioners, all dedicated to upholding the principle that States should be able to support their local cultural sectors through policies and other measures as an essential foundation for ensuring that citizens have access to cultural expressions rooted in their own experience, as well as a genuine diversity of culture coming from beyond their borders.

Ms. Smith, CEO of COSCAP expressed her enthusiasm for the development stating that she has been working with the IFCCD and Trinidadian Ms. Kris Rampersad to make this a reality stating that “there has been much focus on the development of the cultural industries in the Caribbean and by having a Caribbean Coalition that is truly representative of the diversity of cultural participants in the region, civil society has a voice to push our agenda which is to develop and promote an enabling environment. We are at an embryonic stage but we look forward to the rapid expansion of membership and extending the dialogue amongst stakeholders.”

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