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**ST. VINCENT PM URGES CARIBBEAN TO REDUCE TRAVEL  
RESTRICTIONS WITH AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

*Makes comments at the ESC's Trans Atlantic Trade and Investment  
Symposium*

*TT Minister of Trade and Industry Mariano Browne also Speaks*

**July 31, 2009:** Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Honourable Dr. Ralph Gonsalves believes that Caribbean countries should forge deeper ties with African nations – and he is urging them to begin doing this by taking concrete steps to lift travel and visa restrictions with those countries. Dr. Gonsalves was speaking at the Ninth Annual Trans Atlantic Trade and Investment Symposium, organized by the Emancipation Support Committee (ESC) as part of its Emancipation celebrations. Dr. Gonsalves was the keynote speaker at the Symposium, which also featured remarks from Trade and Industry Minister, Senator the Honourable Mariano Browne. The conference drew a diverse group of business leaders from Africa and the United States and the Caribbean. The Symposium was held on Friday at the Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre.

Dr. Gonsalves made the comment about reducing travel restrictions with the Continent during a wide-ranging and often humorous address to the sixty-plus attendees to the Symposium, during which he sought to encourage greater cooperation between the countries of Africa and the Caribbean. He noted that his interest in Africa began in the 1970's when as a young man he studied in Uganda. He identified specific countries – South Africa, Nigeria, Uganda and Ethiopia – as nations where opportunities abound for developing closer economic ties. He pointed to the initiatives taken in St. Vincent where travel restrictions with Ethiopia have already been eased and where his government is seeking further opportunities to do the same with other countries. He also spoke about his experiences leading delegations from St. Vincent for talks with African leaders.

Dr. Gonsalves noted that there were tremendous opportunities for the exchange of skills and the development of business and enterprise with African countries. He even suggested that a trading bloc with Africa, Brazil, Latin America and the Caribbean, as participants might be the perfect alliance, noting with a touch of humour that the acronym spelled ABLAC. In an address interspersed with numerous personal anecdotes and experiences, Dr. Gonsalves urged the participants to "Come home in your head," suggesting that one needed to have that innate desire to reconnect with the birthplace of our ancestors before concrete actions would follow.

In his address to the participants to formally open the Symposium, Minister of Trade and Industry, Senator Mariano Browne, echoed many of the sentiments of



Dr. Gonsalves but went on to showcase more specifically the efforts of GORTT to establish deeper ties with the Continent. He pointed to a recent visit to Trinidad and Tobago by Ministers of African Energy nations at the invitation of the Prime Minister as well as the county's development over the years of "significant levels of trade with major African economies." He however pointed out that the onus to develop further linkages not only lay with the government but also with entrepreneurs taking advantage of the opportunities presented.

The Trans Atlantic Trade and Investment Symposium has, over the years, become a significant forum not only for discussions but for the building of relationships with Africa. Khafra Kambon, Chairman of the ESC noted that because of this Symposium, Trinidad and Tobago can claim a leadership role in building of linkages with Africa – a fact of which the country can be proud. "Historically, there have always been close links and exchanges between Africa and the Diaspora through the arts and culture, and while these must continue, there is tremendous opportunity for the strengthening of the economies of both regions through the establishment of business and trading partnerships," he stated. "The world continues to change, and as the recent global financial meltdown proves, we can no longer rely on the traditional European and American relationships to bolster our own development. We strongly believe, therefore that it is economic partnerships with the nations of Africa that are the key to our future development."

**For more information about Emancipation events, please visit the ESC website at [www.panafricanfestival.org](http://www.panafricanfestival.org).**

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