



Editorial

Time to 'man up' in face of dwindling foreign aid

Tuesday, October 23, 2012

Sir Ronald Sanders had a most interesting commentary in the Sunday Observer two weeks ago that gives added credibility to an argument we have raised in this space before and that, we believe, should guide national thinking.

Sir Ronald, a respected former Caribbean diplomat and international trade expert, pointed out that austerity budgets throughout Europe and government cuts on welfare spending have caused many people in those countries to argue that aid allocations to foreign countries should be reduced and the money spent on domestic needs instead.

Popular media in many European countries, he pointed out, have been in the forefront of the argument to cut aid, a move that will have an adverse effect on the Caribbean.

To justify their argument, the aid cut advocates have revealed how financial assistance has been misspent and even used, in some countries, to purchase military equipment.

Indeed, Sir Ronald pointed to Lord Michael Ashcroft's advice to the British Government to "turn off the golden taps and stop flooding the developing world with our money".

Lord Ashcroft, who was made a Government adviser last month, described Britain's approach to aid for the developing world as "flawed and self-defeating" and urged his Government to avoid "spraying around taxpayers' money" in the developing world like former prime ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

Lord Ashcroft's strident comments remind us of those uttered in 2009 by Lord Phillips, the president of the United Kingdom Supreme Court, that his judges had to spend too much time on cases from the Commonwealth. Caribbean countries, he said, should utilise the Caribbean Court of Justice.

Anyone following world events must have concluded that there would come a day when developed countries, especially those in Europe, would, as Lord Ashcroft proposes, "turn off the golden taps".

We had ample warning with the dismantling of preferential trade arrangements in relation to bananas and sugar in Europe.

Those were hard blows to Caribbean economies, some of which have not properly recovered from the loss of revenue. However, there's no denying the fact that we need to divest ourselves of the sense of entitlement that has, for too long, dictated how we do business.

We reiterate that Caribbean states, in general, have not made sufficient effort to achieve sustainable economic growth and development.

Our political leaders, we hold, expend a lot of energy blaming the plight of the region on external factors, particularly the global economic crisis.

Too many of them advance the opinion that small states are unable to achieve economic development without assistance, in the form of financial aid, from external sources.

We have no doubt that foreign aid has served us well. In fact, there are many social programmes today, born from overseas assistance, that are making a difference in people's lives. We continue to be grateful to our friends who are still extending their goodwill to us, despite the tight constraints at home.

However, we can't continue existing on the belief that financial aid is infinite.

After 50 years of political Independence it is time for us to 'man up' and truly take responsibility for our own affairs.