

**Hon. Ryan Straughn M.P.**  
**Minister in the Ministry of Finance & Economic Affairs**  
**BARBADOS**

Remarks at the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent

December 7, 2022

Madame chair,

Barbados was the birthplace of British slave society and the most ruthlessly colonized by Britain's ruling elites, who made their fortunes from sugar produced by an enslaved, "disposable" workforce, and this great wealth secured Britain's place as an imperial superpower and caused untold suffering.

I quote Hilary Beckles, Professor of History at the University of the West Indies on the decision taken by English investors on the island in the late 1630s.

*The new economic system needed precise operational rules.....built entirely around the legally assured principle of property rights in African bodies.*

*In 1636, a political directive provided that all Africans brought to the island were to be received as lifelong chattels.*

*In 1661, the legislature passed a comprehensive "slave law" that consolidated this culture and surrounded it with additional reinforcements.*

*Not only were Africans deemed chattels, but subsequent laws also defined them as "real estate." The slave laws were not intended to protect lives but to secure the investment value in those lives. Africans were given but one reason to live: to ensure that they served the investors' wealth creation.*

As a result, Barbados has the second largest archive of Transatlantic slave records, second only to the United Kingdom as Barbados was the first stop for ships leaving West Africa with complete manifests.

We are digitizing those records now to give our young people a strong sense of identity but will also serve as the foundation for the valuation of reparations. Anyone in this forum interested in assisting with this effort, please feel free to contact our mission here in Geneva.

Permit me to look to the future with hope, quickly. I proudly report to this Forum that Barbados on becoming a Parliamentary Republic in 2021 has removed the last vestiges of colonial rule and the Parliament in which I now sit, has made a determination to **Reclaim Our Atlantic Destiny**. What does this mean? In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, Barbados prioritized the establishment of two diplomatic missions in Ghana and in Kenya in 2021 and more recently an honorary mission in Rwanda.

Together with the African Export Import Bank, Barbados hosted the first AfriCaribbean Trade and Investment Forum with over 1,000 delegates at the beginning of September 2022 intended to explore opportunities for increased trade, business and leisure between Africa and the Caribbean.

Barbados has also launched the Bridgetown Initiative aimed at reforming the international financial architecture which will address the historical inequities between North and South.

Our mission is to directly reconnect with those whom we have natural affinity. We shall be deliberate in increasing travel between our regions, this time by choice, and craft a new lived reality for the next generation of all young people of African descent.

I ask this forum to join Barbados in the effort to Reclaim Our Atlantic Destiny and I look forward to welcoming you all to Barbados very soon to advance these important discussions, deepen ties and to deliver social and economic justice on behalf of those who have gone before.

Madame Chair.

I am obliged to you.