

Antigua PM says benefits of Caricom integration 'unequal'



Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Gaston Browne PHOTO COURTESY UN CLIMATE CHANGE

ST JOHN'S, Antigua — Antigua Prime Minister Gaston Browne has pointed to what he says are uneven benefits of integration within the regional body, the Caribbean Community (Caricom), saying that some nations prioritise their own economic advantages while neglecting the needs of smaller member states like Antigua and Barbuda.

Speaking recently on a local radio station, Browne highlighted the disparity in trade benefits among Caricom nations, emphasising that while some countries, such as Trinidad and Tobago, have reaped substantial economic rewards from regional trade agreements, smaller nations have largely become consumer markets with limited production capacity.

He argued that this imbalance undermines the intended spirit of Caricom's economic co-operation.

“There are those within the integration movement who take a brutal approach, essentially saying there are winners and losers,” Browne said.

“Some of the larger economies benefit immensely, while smaller states like Antigua and Barbuda are left primarily as consumer markets without sufficient production to balance the trade equation.”

The Prime Minister also said there is the reluctance of certain Caricom nations to contribute to the Caribbean Development Fund (CDF), which was established to support disadvantaged member states by providing financial assistance to build economic capacity and mitigate trade imbalances.

According to the Prime Minister, some countries that benefit the most from Caricom trade agreements have failed to uphold their commitments to the fund, leaving smaller economies struggling to compete.

“We have the CDF, which was designed to smooth out these trade differentials, but some Caricom nations have been hesitant to contribute adequately,”

Browne noted. “This lack of commitment to equitable economic development only deepens the divide between the more industrialised and less developed member states.”

The Prime Minister also warned that if these disparities persist, it could weaken the foundations of regional co-operation.

He called for a more collaborative approach, where all Caricom nations actively support economic balancing measures to ensure that smaller economies are not marginalised.

“I don't believe there has to be ultimate winners and losers ... we need a better-negotiated, co-operative approach so that every Caricom country can

benefit equitably.

Otherwise, integration becomes a mechanism for exploitation rather than collective prosperity,” the Prime Minister noted. (CMC)