

by Janelle Conaway

Caribbean General Assembly

NOWADAYS THE WORD security tends to be linked closely to the need to fight terrorism. Ambassador Michael King of Barbados sees security as a much broader concern.

Small island states, in particular, face a range of threats to their stability and even survival, King says—threats as diverse as drug trafficking, HIV/AIDS, transnational crime, natural disasters, and rising sea levels. In a small country, problems tend to have national reach. When drug traffickers set up operations or a hurricane hits the coast or the market for a basic commodity disappears, the effects can include economic disruption, social upheaval, and political instability.

"We are operating in a very vulnerable environment," King says. He hopes the next session of the OAS General Assembly, which takes place June 2–4 in Bridgetown,

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Barbados, will help put the spotlight on this multidimensional concept of hemispheric security, as well as other issues of particular concern to Caribbean countries.

"The Caribbean represents part of the diversity of the Organization of American States," King says. "We want to make this General Assembly a Caribbean General Assembly."

King says that small countries have faced new burdens since the terrorist attacks of last September, such as the need to increase security measures for airports and sea ports. At the same time, some countries have had significant drops in tourism, and customs revenues are falling due to the lowering of trade barriers.

"There are many challenges for small states," King says. He and his Caribbean colleagues also share a concern about the future availability of OAS cooperation funds for development.

Besides raising awareness about the Caribbean region's concerns, the 2002 General Assembly can help highlight the OAS's contributions, King says. The English-speaking

countries of the Caribbean, he says, have an "exemplary" tradition of democratic governance characterized by well-developed judicial systems, a strong respect for human rights and the rule of law, mature political parties, and well-educated citizens.

"I feel we have a story to tell," says King, a career diplomat who represents Barbados before the White House and the OAS and serves as non-resident ambassador to Costa Rica, Mexico, and Panama.

During last year's negotiations to draft the Inter-American Democratic Charter, the English-speaking Caribbean played a pivotal role in strengthening the document, King says.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries believed that a draft Democratic Charter presented at the June 2001 General Assembly in Costa Rica was still "seriously flawed" and insisted on a more in-depth review, King says. That review, he added, led to a better document being adopted on September 11 in Lima, Peru.

Trinidad and Tobago became the first English-speaking Caribbean country to join the OAS, in 1967, followed later that same year by Barbados. This will be the fifth OAS General Assembly to be hosted by a Caribbean country; others have been held in

Haiti (1995), the Bahamas (1992), Saint Lucia (1981), and Grenada (1977).

Support from Turkey

THE GOVERNMENT of Turkey recently donated nearly \$15,000 to help fund several OAS projects, including the publication of *Américas* magazine. Ambassador Farouk Logoglu presented the contributions, which also included funds donated for the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism, the Tourism Unit's Fund for Data Collection, and the OAS Children's Corner on the Web (www.oas.org/children).

Turkey is one of fifty-three OAS permanent observers, a status that allows countries around the world to closely follow developments in the Americas. Georgia is the latest country to become an observer.

Last year, permanent observers contributed some \$8.3 million to help fund a range of OAS activities. Norway, Spain, and Sweden were the largest donors, together contributing nearly \$5 million. Cyprus, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, Japan, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia, South Korea, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom also made contributions in 2001.

Speaking Out in Venezuela

SANTIAGO A. CANTON, executive secretary of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, visited Venezuela to explore the state of freedom of expression in that country, in response to an invitation from the Venezuelan



Ambassador Michael King of Barbados talks about the challenges facing the Caribbean nations

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