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Jamaica House
Kingston, Jamaica

Grenada: Internal Situation
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The F.C.O. have been
asked for a draft reply.
A27

PRIME MINISTERS 26th October 1983

Dear Prime Minister

PERSONAL MESSAGE

SERIAL No. T 1668/83

You will be aware of a military action involving Grenada which commenced yesterday morning and which has attracted considerable international attention. I know that you will be deeply interested in this matter and I feel that I should write to you to explain the background against which this action has been taken.

You will remember that in March, 1979, Mr. Maurice Bishop overthrew the Government of Grenada led by Mr. Eric Gairy in what was a bloodless coup. At that time Caribbean Governments, and indeed many others, expressed strong disagreement with this method of changing government, and at that time the strongest concern was expressed at the importation of this method of governmental change into the English-speaking Caribbean which had up till then an unblemished record of changing governments through the electoral process. In making a judgement about our relations with the new Government under Maurice Bishop, note was, however, taken of the fact that that Government enjoyed a wide measure of support by the Grenadian people who obviously saw it to be a release from the tyrannical excesses which the previous Prime Minister, Eric Gairy, had imposed on his people notwithstanding the fact that he had been constitutionally elected by them.

Since 1979 there has been a wide measure of cooperation within the Caribbean Community between the Bishop Government and their CARICOM partners. In the background to this cooperation there have however been differences over the ideological stance of the Bishop Government, and more particularly, there have been reservations connected with the strongly held suspicions that Grenada was serving as a conduit for subversive actions in a number of the Caribbean countries in the Eastern Caribbean. The fact is, however, that there was a continuing working relationship between us.

The events of last week created a totally different situation. What seemed to begin as internal Party dissension over the leadership developed into a situation in which Prime Minister Bishop and almost the entire Cabinet was executed, and on that and subsequent occasions a number of leading trade unionists, other citizens and children of Grenada have also been killed. The precise numbers are not yet known. Following the execution of Prime Minister Bishop and in response to the large public support which he obviously enjoyed the entire population of Grenada was subjected to virtual house arrest through the imposition of a 96-hour curfew.

This was the situation that confronted the English-speaking Caribbean Governments last week, and which led them to the decision to meet for a full discussion of the matter in Port of Spain over the weekend.

In those discussions the Governments comprising the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, St. Vincent and The Grenadines, St. Kitts/Nevis, St. Lucia and Montserrat) which had met among themselves the previous day informed their other CARICOM colleagues of the situation and of their grave concern for the safety of their nationals in Grenada, and that they deemed their own peace and security to be under serious threat. The depth of their anxiety was evident. They pointed out that under the Treaty establishing their Organization there is provision for them to take joint action to protect the security of their region; and they invited their other CARICOM colleagues to join them in such action.

There was discussion about a range of sanctions against Grenada which had been previously determined both by the OECS countries themselves and by certain other CARICOM countries including Jamaica. It was strongly argued, however, that none of these sanctions would deal with the situation sufficiently quickly to resolve the real crisis which was seen to require urgent action. The fear was that the new regime would be allowed sufficient time to become entrenched and to strengthen its hold on power in Grenada and in its suppression of the Grenadian people.

In order for you to understand the degree of concern that is felt it is useful for you to know that in a population of about 100,000 people the Grenadian army numbers about 3,000 or 3% and there is in addition a very large people's militia. None of the OECS Governments has an army numbering more than about 200 men. Indeed Grenada, while among the smallest countries, has the largest army in the English speaking Caribbean. It is in fact one and a half times the size of the Jamaican Defence Force although our population is two million persons. In addition Grenada has a broadcasting capability vastly greater than any of those countries, which has been used in the past as a subversive tool. Behind all this it is also known that the regime has been sustained by substantial external support in men and materials.

The Government of Jamaica has always been a firm and unstinting supporter of the principles of non-intervention and self-determination of peoples and of respect for human rights. We continue our support for those principles.

There are times when Governments face painful choices. This was one of those occasions. In the face of a plea by the Governments of small countries, who feel themselves threatened by unfolding events in a close neighbouring country but do not have the capacity to defend themselves in any way and who realise that the new military leadership of Grenada was now hard-line Marxist in ideology and vicious beyond the worst atrocities of this nature committed elsewhere in many, many years.

Jamaica shares the view that the people of Grenada ought to be given the opportunity to return to normality and a constitutional order in which they can decide for themselves what kind of Government they want and who they want to lead them.

It is against all of this background and with a solemn sense of responsibility to our partners in the Caribbean Community of the Eastern Caribbean that the decision was made to join with Barbados and the United States of America, to whom the OECS had also made this plea for assistance, in the action which commenced yesterday morning.

The firm intention of all these Governments is that this action is carried out in the quickest possible time and with the least possible loss of life, and that thereafter an interim civilian administration be established by the Governor General with the prime task of arranging for the holding of elections. It is also the understanding of all these Governments that the United States forces will withdraw from Grenada as soon as possible after the military action is completed. During this interim period the CARICOM Peace Keeping Forces will be available to the interim administration for whatever purposes the administration deems appropriate.

The recent developments in Grenada are regarded by Caribbean Governments as a dangerous aberration which contains a serious threat to countries in the region. It is this that has led to what is acknowledged to be an unusual decision. As I have already said it was not an easy decision, but in the final analysis the interests of the Eastern Caribbean countries (including Grenada) and their concern for the peace, security and stability in the region were compelling.

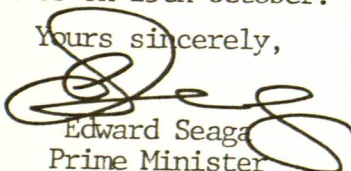
I am aware of the strong principles which guide your own consideration in matters of this kind, and of the wider implications that these actions can be deemed to have for the international community. I hope that in judging this you will also take account of the factors which I have outlined to you at some length, and in particular the deep anxieties of the several small countries which are most closely affected.

I wish to stress that Jamaica does not regard the action in Grenada as intervention, nor is intervention a practice to which we would subscribe. We acted in response to an urgent plea from a group of small defenceless countries who themselves are bound together by treaty obligations on which they based their appeal to three other countries - Barbados, Jamaica and the United States - to assist them to restore normality in the beleaguered country of Grenada and to remove the threat to their security posed by Grenada under its present rulers who have comparatively awesome military capabilities at their command and external support from Nations with a known record for subversion.

As additional information I am attaching the following:

- letter from the Chairman of the OECS requesting our assistance in the joint action
- my statement to the Jamaica House of Representatives on 25th October
- the Resolution adopted without division by the House of Representatives on 25th October.

Yours sincerely,


Edward Seaga
Prime Minister