

to the accession of British Guiana to independence in May of this year. Three weeks ago, the Barbados Legislature completed the processes of deciding to seek independence, and I expect that a constitutional conference will be called this year. British Honduras has, I understand, comparable ambitions for the not-too-distant future. The other islands are progressing towards a wider measure of self-government.

We feel particularly close to the Commonwealth members in this Hemisphere because of the facts of geography and history. We are especially concerned that they should enjoy political stability, social progress and economic welfare. In anticipation of the coming of independence, Canada embarked in 1958 on a five-year programme of development assistance for the Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean. Since 1963 this programme has been enlarged and, as these countries work out their plans for the future, we are seeking new and improved ways of co-operating with them.

For some months we have been discussing with various of the Caribbean leaders the organization of a conference at which all aspects of relations between Canada and the West Indies might be reviewed. You will have noted that, when the Prime Minister paid official visits late last year to Jamaica and to Trinidad, the communiqués issued after his talks with Mr. Sangster and Dr. Williams referred to such a conference. Three weeks ago, a group of Canadian officials met with officials from the two independent countries and ten of the dependent territories to take preparatory steps towards the conference, which is to take place later this year. I am confident that it will do much to place our future relations on a sound and intimate footing. I shall not try to anticipate the results of the conference, but I know that Canadians all across the country share with me the hope and expectation that it will serve to strengthen further the Commonwealth as well as our relations with the West Indies.

I have started my remarks on the developing Commonwealth, Mr. Chairman, by referring to closer relations with the West Indies. You may ask how these developments are related to the central question of the position of the Commonwealth in world affairs. You may also ask whether we would not develop relations with regional neighbours whether the nations concerned had a Commonwealth heritage or not.

I would stress two points in answer to such questions. In the first place, the development of our relations with the West Indies provides an excellent illustration of the way in which the membership as a whole, or groups of nations in different areas within the Commonwealth, are co-operating in new projects of mutual benefit. The Commonwealth is no longer thought of only in terms of the preservation by individual nations, in their relations with Britain, of what can logically remain after independence. Nations are making use of what they have in common as a basis for co-operation of a new type, in which any member can propose collective action.