

Manning Urges Governance Change

by **Prime Minister Patrick Manning**

Participants at a Commonwealth-sponsored workshop in Trinidad have agreed that the Westminster system of government must evolve in order to promote greater participation in governance.

Government ministers, opposition leaders and civil society leaders from twelve Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean are meeting in Port of Spain to discuss how governments and opposition parties can work together to strengthen the democratic process in their countries and the region.

Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Patrick Manning who addressed the opening session on Monday, said the Westminster system has outlived its usefulness.

He also believes that the practice of governments governing and opposition simply opposing has to change.

Mr Manning said local government bodies, whether they are controlled by opposition or governing parties, should be in charge of community development to allow for greater participation.

Local government

He sees policy being made by the central government with the local bodies as implementers of the policy.

Additionally, Mr Manning said there is a place in the national parliament for the chairmen of the local government bodies.

He believes if this change is made, it can stimulate the constitutional change that's needed.

"It raises and puts very squarely on the table the issue of the reform of the constitution in this country and I suspect in every other country in the region," he said.

NGO representative Sheila Solomon who agreed with Mr Manning, said her idea of increased responsibility and representation at the local level goes beyond what the Trinidad and Tobago leader is advocating.

"Effective local government would free parliamentarians to concentrate on the increasingly complex challenges facing small island developing states in the global environment."

Grenada's opposition leader, Tillman Thomas, is happy with increasing levels of discussion between governments and opposition.

He said that participation can be encouraged by the establishment of a Caribbean Foundation for Democracy.

"A non-partisan Caribbean Foundation for Democracy to educate people on the parliamentary process and to promote democracy in the region."

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