



**TRIBUTES TO
SIR SHRIDATH "SONNY" RAMPHAL**

JUNIOR LODGE

ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL, STRUCTURAL ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND TRADE (SETT), ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN CARIBBEAN AND PACIFIC STATES (OACPS)

Sir Shridath Ramphal was a towering figure whose legacy is deeply interwoven with the history and progress of the Caribbean, the Global South, and the world at large. A proud son of Guyana, renaissance Caribbean man and fervent internationalist, his career spanned law, diplomacy, and statesmanship, marked by an unwavering commitment to the principles of justice, equity, and the empowerment of economically and politically marginalized countries.

Sir Shridath's legal acumen, sharpened by his extensive training, equipped him with the intellectual rigor and eloquence necessary to influence international discourse. His prowess as a negotiator and diplomat was evident in his leadership of the Group of 77 and the Non-Aligned Movement, where he tirelessly advocated for the interests of the Third World. His central role in establishing the Group of African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) States stands as a testament to his dedication to forging solidarity among developing nations.

One of Sir Shridath's most significant contributions was his work as the principal Caribbean negotiator during the negotiations of the then European Economic Community (EEC) and nascent ACP Group. The resulting first Lomé Convention, was groundbreaking with its blend of non-reciprocal access to the EEC market and innovative mechanisms like STABEX and SYSMIN that protected beneficiary countries from fluctuations in agricultural and mining export earnings. These provisions reflected Sir Shridath's commitment to the New International Economic Order, yet another initiative he passionately championed.

Sir Shridath's visionary leadership extended to the global stage through his work with The Commonwealth. His relentless efforts in the fight against apartheid in South Africa and his instrumental role in the emergence of an independent Zimbabwe are universally acclaimed. Equally significant, if less widely recognised, remains his sustained advocacy for the development interests of Commonwealth small states that yielded preferential treatment in the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) negotiations.



Beyond his diplomatic achievements, Sir Shridath's influence was felt in the realm of sustainable development. As a member of the Brundtland Commission, he was ahead of his time in calling for a global framework on sustainable development, underscoring his foresight and commitment to tackling climate change as a prerequisite for long-term global welfare.

His dedication to Caribbean integration was epitomized in his chairmanship of the West Indian Commission, which produced the seminal report "Time for Action." This manifesto laid the foundation for a reimagined Caribbean regional integration process and resulted in the creation of the Caribbean Regional Negotiation Machinery (CRNM), where Sir Shridath served as the first Director-General. The initial cohort of CRNM trade experts – Sir Alistir McIntyre, Amb. Richard Bernal, Amb. Henry Gill, Bishonaut Persaud, Kathy-Ann Brown and Pamela Coke-Hamilton all exuded Sir Shridath's intellectual rigour, professionalism and vision for advancing Caribbean regional development.

Sir Shridath's commitment to human development is perhaps most enduringly reflected in his role in academia. As Chancellor of the University of Warwick, University of Guyana, and University of the West Indies, he championed the power of education and intellectual inquiry as cornerstones of development. The Shridath Ramphal Centre for International Trade Law, Policy and Services (SRC) stands as a fitting tribute to his legacy, continuing his work in training a new cohort of trade policy experts and negotiators to advance Caribbean interests.

In sum, Sir Shridath Ramphal's life was one of service, intellect, and vision. His contributions to the Caribbean, the Global South, and the world are immeasurable, and his legacy will continue to inspire generations to come.

MICHELE LOWE

SENIOR CO-ORDINATOR, HEMISPHERIC AND BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS, CARICOM SINGLE MARKET AND TRADE, CARICOM SECRETARIAT

I had the pleasure and honor of working closely with SSR in the early RNM years. I have strong memories of the closing sessions of the post-Lome IV negotiations at the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels (where I first met David Hales!!!) and then flying with him from London to join SAM (Sir Alister McIntyre) in Havana for the initial talks that launched the negotiations for the CARICOM-Cuba Trade and economic co-operation agreement.

Although SSR (and SAM) walked among kings, it was their compassion and consideration for the young minds that they nurtured, that I remember and appreciate. SSR took the time at the end of each year to write to individual RNM team members to share the organisation's accomplishments and to thank them for their contribution to its successes. I still have my love letters from SSR (smile), as well as the many 'Blue Books', 'Red Books' and 'Green Books', which became his signature method of communicating with CARICOM Heads on important trade policy developments.



PAMELA COKE-HAMILTON

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE

Twenty years ago, the first cohort of the newly launched Masters in International Trade Policy entered Cave Hill and became the pioneers in what would become a flagship programme for the University and recognised across the academic world. The MITP however needed a home that would provide a space to interrogate the new and emerging areas of international trade, law, policy and services trade. The seismic changes that came with globalisation required a new set of skills and teaching within the halls of the region's highest institution of learning. The Shridath Ramphal Centre became that space and encapsulated the hopes and aspirations of a new generation of trade warriors representing the Caribbean region.

Sir Shridath embodied the very vision of what we were trying to accomplish through this Centre. The creation of a cadre of highly qualified professionals, steeped in the intricacies of law, economics, diplomacy and development. His career epitomised the very essence of global influence, crafted and burnished in the small Caribbean region but so powerful that it became the colossus that stood in the face of apartheid, the ICJ defense of Guyanas territorial integrity, the crafting of a new trade agenda among so many other enormous accomplishments. He has left a legacy which is unparalleled and I am proud to have been a part of ensuring that his name and memory will be embedded in a small but tangible way for decades to come.



DR. JAN YVES REMY

DIRECTOR, SHRIDATH RAMPHAL CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE LAW, POLICY, AND SERVICES

News of the passing of Sir Shridath last week continues to reverberate through the highest echelons of diplomatic and political spheres across the Caribbean and around the world. For his impressive career, he was fittingly dubbed the 'Statesman of the West Indies', a likely reference to the time when he first emerged on the regional scene as the newly independent countries of the British West Indies began to flex their muscle, and a nod to the high esteem in which he was held on the international stage.

While tributes often exaggerate the accomplishments of the deceased, for those of us in the trade community, the opposite might be true: I struggle to find any individual who has so profoundly defined the region's internal and external trade agenda over the past 60 years as Sir Shridath did. He not only blazed a trail, but he also illuminated a path for future generations of trade experts, me included.

As the Director of the University of the West Indies' Shridath Ramphal Centre for International Trade Law, Policy, and Services (SRC) at the Cave Hill Campus – an institution that since 2004 has trained over 300 Caribbean trade policy professionals – and inspired by the title of his autobiographical work, I am moved in this SRC Trading Thoughts to provide a few “*Glimpses of the Remarkable Trade Life*” of Shridath “Sonny” Ramphal.

Charting the Region's Trade Policy

Just as Schuman and Monnet are celebrated as the architects of the European Union, and Washington and Jefferson are revered as the Founding Fathers of the United States, Sir Shridath undoubtedly stands among the titans who laid the foundations of this region's internal trade policy. For his seminal work in the early days of regional integration, Sir Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, referred to Sir Shridath as a "labourer in the vineyard" of Caribbean integration.

In 1965, he was tasked by the political leaders of the day with drafting the first CARIFTA Agreement, the precursor to the Treaty of Chaguaramas in 1973 that created CARICOM. When it was time to review the operation of that original Treaty, he was entrusted with chairing the West Indian Commission—a body of esteemed Caribbean men and women tasked with appraising the integration experiment up until then and making recommendations for its improvement.

His chairmanship of the West Indian Commission culminated in the Report entitled *Time For Action*, which should be core reading in the classrooms of all students of regional integration. Reflecting the excellent lawyer and scholar he was, Sir Shridath's forensic approach to identifying problems involved exhaustive and tedious research on each topic, culminating in well-articulated and comprehensive solution on how to fix the region's “implementation deficit” and inadequate structures to achieve Caribbean integration. Sir Shridath will always be a favourite of mine for his spirited defense of the idea of a Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) - the subject of my doctoral thesis and a real experiment of our integration process that remains close to my heart.

As with his other works, like his autobiographical *Glimpses of a Global Life*, what I loved most about his scholarship were the moments when he deviated slightly from the technical details to infuse the subject matter with his uninhibited passion. In his preface to *Time for Action*, he declared:

I am Guyanese before I am Indian; I am West Indian before I am Guyanese ... That oneness replaces separateness in four generations, and so it is for most of the people in our CARICOM region. That oneness is the basic reality of our West Indian condition.

Speaking as a nonagenarian to the Heads of Government at the 50th anniversary of CARICOM in 2023, Sir Shridath would appear just a little bit frailer but with the characteristic resoluteness of his earlier years. Invoking the memory of his friends from the "vineyard", like Sir Alister McIntyre and Dr. "Willie" Demas, and drawing on his themes from the past, lamented that the region had "missed out too often on the time for action" and implored it to think again in terms of "oneness".

Enduring Ideas and Contributions

But he was not solely adviser or darling of the Caribbean political directorate. He shot into the international arena and more than held his own in several trade negotiation roles, starting with his involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77, and later, as a participant in discussions on the New International Economic Order (NIEO).

For all the criticisms of "radicalism" attributed to the NIEO, his thinking was clear and remains relevant to today's discourse, steeped in justice and equity. In one of his early articulations of economic relations between developed and developing countries, he called on countries from the Global North – in this case the United States – to understand their symbiotic relationship with the Global South and seek a mutually beneficial relationship in an increasingly globalized world:

What the Third World is seeking should not be seen as a redistribution in its favor of a static world income, with its implication of a diminished share for the developed nations. ... There is a quickening symbiotic relationship between development in the poor countries and continued growth in the rich. Traditional economics has tended to emphasize the one-way flow from the developed to the developing. The reverse flow is equally important for sustaining employment levels in the United States, and it is becoming more so...

The new contract which the Third World seeks with the First World and the Second, is not aid oriented ... It rests firmly and securely on the premise that the dependent relationships of the past have served the world badly; that isolationism is not an option open to even the most powerful of countries; that interdependence is the only road along which the world can travel; and that in this planetary bargain, its short-term problems notwithstanding, there are no losers.

He embraced the concept of globalization, but simply demanded more from a trade system that had to serve the poorest and most vulnerable. Fifty years on, there is still a concern that the developing world's development concerns have not been sufficiently engaged by the international trade community.

Legacy in International Negotiations

Sir Shridath played an instrumental role in the discussions around the formation of the ACP Group. As recounted by Junior Lodge, the current Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of ACP States, Sir Shridath was central to establishing the Group of African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) States, forging solidarity among developing nations during the negotiations with the European Economic Community (EEC), which resulted in the first Lomé Convention.

His trade efforts culminated in the creation of an advisory plenipotentiary role by CARICOM leaders as the first Chief Negotiator of the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery, where he served the region, once again with Sir Alister McIntyre. That duo was an enduring tale as these two eventually became Chancellor and Vice Chancellor, respectively, of the University of the West Indies.

An Enduring Legacy at the SRC

It is therefore unsurprising that, when the region needed to create and name an institution to train the region's trade experts, the only name that was ever in contention was Sir Shridath's. According to the SRC's first Director, Pamela Coke-Hamilton who now heads the UN's International Trade Centre,

Back in 2004, the region needed a home that would provide a space to interrogate the new and emerging areas of international trade, law, policy, and services trade. The seismic changes that came with globalization required a new set of skills and teaching within the halls of the region's highest institution of learning. The Shridath Ramphal Centre became that space and encapsulated the hopes and aspirations of a new generation of trade warriors representing the Caribbean region. Sir Shridath was chosen because he "embodied the very vision of what we were trying to accomplish through this Centre.

Another of the SRC's previous Directors, Dr. Keith Nurse, says of him that he saw value in a "proactive role for international organizations and academic institutions. He would say that the real power of these organizations was to convene, coordinate, and collaborate."

The current curriculum of the SRC carefully tracks the areas where Sir Shridath had a hand in shaping the region's trade agenda—from global governance, Caribbean trade policy, regional integration, the law of the WTO, trade negotiations, to the Centre's new direction in the sustainability agenda. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that he was also a member of the Brundtland Commission, which is credited often with establishing the key elements of the modern-day sustainable development agenda. In one of his written pieces on the topic from 1987, Sir Shridath articulated what could pass for modern day writing on the topic, including highlighted the grave threat of climate change:

Sustainability... has to be both perceived and measured in global terms. It is not simply a question of the degree to which each nation can sustain or improve upon its national level of development, whether that be a state of prosperity or only an ambition for it. In specific and important areas, careful management of resources will be needed to avoid sustainable limits being surpassed... Perhaps the most serious of the limits now being recognized relates to the atmosphere. The long-term energy problem has traditionally been seen in terms of the world running out of non-renewable fuels. A more serious and immediate threat is the steady build-up in the atmosphere of CO2 emissions from fossil fuel burning..."

A Rich Heritage to Uphold

Many of the causes for which Sir Shridath fought and dedicated his long career still plague the region and the world— inequities between the Global North and South persist, our world is being unsustainably managed pushing our planetary boundaries to the brink of collapse, the CARICOM regional project still has not achieved important milestones, and our economies are still among the least integrated among regional groupings. Understanding where he came from – from his great-grandmother’s travel to Guyana from Calcutta, through the seesaw of regional progress, to the heights of the global stage – it would be easy, indeed understandable, for him to have become cynical about our region’s prospects or withered away on the vineyard on which he worked for so many years.

But when I visited him at his Barbados residence last year at his invitation, I found awaiting my arrival the erect bearing of a dignified and distinguished statesman. I almost fell off my chair when I learned that he was clearly following my work and that of the Centre, and when he asked after persons he had known and worked with when he was active on the trade scene. After an endearing conversation in which he enquired as to the work I was doing, he uttered his one request: would I share some books he had kept in storage with my students? And I, in turn, uttered my own: would he do me the honour of signing my copy of *Glimpses of a Global Life*, which he obliged, inscribing in his own hand the words:

*“To Jan
With Good Wishes,
Sonny Ramphal.”*

Leaving the cocoon of his home, I tarried just a little longer than I normally would have, to take in the immensity of the moment I was experiencing. As I drove away and beheld him in the rearview mirror waving goodbye from his beautiful Great House verandah, Rudyard Kipling’s “If” came to mind: in his illustrious life, Sir Shridath had certainly “walked with Kings” but in the process he had not “lost the common touch...”

At the University of the West Indies, we have much to celebrate about the life of Shridath Ramphal, having had the privilege of his Chancellorship; and at the SRC, we have the distinct honour of continuing his legacy in trade through our three pillars of advocacy, researching and training. Personally, his passing has inflamed a burning desire to bury myself in the Shridath Ramphal Archives at the Cave Hill Campus to devour his unadulterated content and be awed by his courage and perspicacity. But institutionally, I see a role for the Centre, not just remember and honor his statesmanship and accolades, but to bring an understanding of how his ideological leanings, worldview, values, and beliefs, helped shape regional and global governance and still speaks to us through the annals of time.