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Talk to US

Trade lawyer says taking rum issue directly to WTO may not be best approach

Barbados and its Caribbean neighbours concerned about negative fallout from United States rum subsidies may win the battle and risk losing the war if they take their dispute to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Instead, said American trade lawyer Andrea Ewart, the region might get a better resolution if it works the issue out directly with the US. The Jamaica-born Ewart, who was in Barbados last week as the featured presenter at a United States Embassy Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) technical meeting with Barbados private sector representatives, said she was not privy to the discussions involving the rum divide, but she said the subsidies to producers in the United States Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico was "possibly" a violation of World Trade Organisation rules.

But even if Barbados and company got such proof, she said, the region would still have to work the issue out with the US.

Speaking at Courtyard Marriott during an interview with BARBADOS BUSINESS AUTHORITY, Ewart said: "That is a very complex issue because the Rum Cover-Over Programme, which is what is at the heart of the issue, has existed since [the 1900s] and it was not created to provide a subsidy for the rum producers, but it's being used that way."

"Is this a violation of WTO law? Possibly, but that would require more extensive analysis and so on to arrive at the determination. Even if it were, is going to the WTO the best remedy for Barbados or for the region, or would it perhaps be a combined approach because a win at the WTO would still nevertheless require coming back to partner with the US, having discussions with the US to try to resolve the issue."

"So that would suggest that those discussions with the US should be taking place," she added.

The attorney at law, who heads DevelopTradeLaw, LLC, based in Washington DC, also saw a need for the trade relationship between the Caribbean and US, within the context of the Caribbean Basin Initiative, to evolve 30 years after the initial legislation was passed. (SC)



Andrea Ewart (SC)

'Private sector has key role in region'

The private sector may have to play a key role in financing the global sustainable development agenda for the world's poorer countries, Barbados and its CARICOM neighbours among them.

And with the United Nations (UN) Development Agenda beyond 2015 soon to be outlined, both Barbados' UN Ambassador, Joseph Goddard, and former Minister of Energy, Liz Thompson, now a UN consultant, said in New York that the answer to the key question of where the money to finance the programme will come from was clear.

They said the private sector could be the source of the funds but the money would have to be put into profit-oriented ventures, especially in small island-developing states, small island developing states, which range from Samoa, Barbados, The Bahamas, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago to Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada and others in the Caribbean, the Pacific and elsewhere.

"There is money out there and where it can be show that there will be profit in this, you will get business people coming on board," said Goddard when addressing the issue of financing for sustainable development.

"So long as we are able to come up

with projects and there are projects already that exist... we are confident the funds will be made available and we believe we have the moral high ground to continue to put the case for necessary funding."

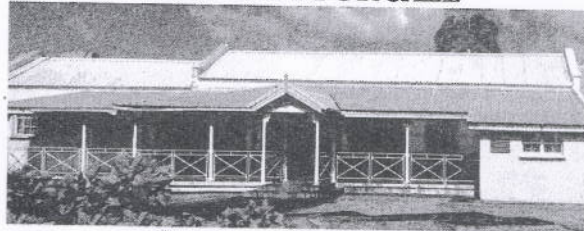
The Ambassador made his views known at the launching of a new book, *From Rio+20 To A New Development Agenda, Building A Bridge To A Sustainable Future*. It was co-authored by Thompson, who served as one of two executive coordinators of the 2010 Rio Conference on Sustainable Development.

The launch was held at the Spanish Cultural Centre in Manhattan.

Thompson said that she was "optimistic" that money would be found to help finance the new agenda for small island developing states and other developing countries, but the reality was that the financial landscape had changed and the official development assistance package had shrunk and was unlikely to return to prior levels.

"There is money in the market and insofar as the private sector recognises investment opportunities which can yield a high return, then they are going to be prepared to put their resources in," she said. (TB)

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