

**REMARKS BY VICE MINISTER LUIS FERNANDO ANDRADE FALLA
DURING THE OPENING OF THE ACS HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON
DISASTER REDUCTION**



Your Excellency,
Jacques Edouard Alexis,
Prime Minister of Haiti

Your Excellency
Jean Réналd Clérismé
Minister of Foreign Affaire of Haiti

Your Excellencies
Ministers of the Member Countries and Observers of the Association of Caribbean States

Honourable Rubén Silié, Secretary General of the ACS

Honourable Heads of Delegation of Member Countries, Observers and International Organizations

Mrs. Margareta Walhstrom
Assistant Secretary General/Coordinator Designate for Emergency Relief of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Mr. Luis Carpio,
Director of Transport and Natural Disasters of the Association of Caribbean States

Members of the Diplomatic Corps International Organizations

Special Invitees

Members of the social communication media

Friends all

Permit me to begin these remarks by thanking the people and government of Haiti for the warm and cordial welcome extended to us since our arrival in this beautiful country.

And especially, in our capacity as Chair of the ACS Natural Disasters Committee, to recognize the determination and interest of the Haitian authorities in making this High Level Conference on Disaster Reduction a reality. An event that will be today inaugurated by His Excellency Jacques Edouard Alexis, Prime Minister of Haiti, who honours us with his presence. Likewise, we cannot omit to mention the dedicated and efficient work of the ACS Secretariat and of the United Nations

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and of all those other organizations and persons who have made possible the holding of this event.

I wish to recall that in their 4th Summit of Heads of State/Government of the Association of Caribbean States, in the Declaration of Panama, they welcomed the Kyoto Framework of Action, approved during the Second World Conference for Disaster Reduction, reaffirming the importance of integrating disaster management and risk reduction in development strategies and plans at all levels of Government and the need to promote international financial assistance and the transfer of necessary technologies to strengthen risk management capacities in vulnerable countries.

For this reason, our country supported from the beginning and with special interest the convening of this ACS High Level Conference on Disaster Reduction, because, without doubt, it will help to implement the wishes of our Heads of State and/or Government.

As is public knowledge, many of the natural disasters occurring in our region affect more than one of the member countries of the Greater Caribbean. Such has been the case of the Hurricanes.

We only have to recall the names of Dennis, Emily, Katrina, Rita and Wilma, which happened in 2005; Ernest, Helen and Gordon in 2006 and Dean and Felix in 2007 for tragic images to return to our minds, due to the irreparable loss of human lives and the severe harm and damage suffered by citizens of our region in the face of the assaults of these Hurricanes, which affected several of our countries that comprise the Greater Caribbean.

Just in 2005, whose Hurricane season was the most active in history, there were at least 2,280 fatalities and record material damage of more than 128 billion dollars. In 2006, there were 11 direct and 6 indirect fatalities and the total damage was estimated to be 500 million dollars.

And during 2007 there have been 356 fatalities confirmed and material damage of up to 3.8 billion dollars. Moreover, this year, for the first time in the Atlantic, two category 5 Hurricanes, Dean and Felix, made landfall with this strength in the same season.

Without a doubt, the Hurricanes of the recent past, in addition to other types of disasters likely to occur in the Greater Caribbean, are proof of the importance of this ACS High Level Conference on Disaster Reduction.

In this respect, Guatemala deeply appreciates the function the ACS plays as an entity that promotes the Greater Caribbean as a zone of cooperation, in which its Member States and Associate Members share a common geographic space.

For Guatemala, the ACS constitutes an appropriate space to deliberate on forms of collaboration that would allow us to confront with greater cohesion the

challenges imposed on us by the agenda of today's dynamic and changing world. Events such as the ACS High Level Conference on Disaster Reduction, which opens today, constitute a palpable demonstration of the positive effects the ACS can have on the inhabitants of the Greater Caribbean, especially on the most vulnerable socioeconomic sectors, which are usually those most affected by natural disasters.

For Guatemala, integration with the Greater Caribbean is of vital importance and constitutes one of the most important pillars of our foreign policy. We are therefore committed to advancing a long term vision that would permit the region to occupy its corresponding position in the global scenario, via integration constructed on the basis of dialogue, cooperation, solidarity and respect; and sustained by the principles and norms of coexistence under international law, so that the effort might have the desired fruits.

The results of the ACS High Level Conference on Disaster Reduction, which opens today, will without doubt constitute an important contribution for a region that has been constantly assailed by the violent forces of nature. Joint and coordinated actions by our countries of the Greater Caribbean are part of the response to confront them more effectively and efficiently.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate, in our capacity as Chair of the ACS Natural Disasters Committee, our recognition of the Government of Haiti and all the persons and institutions who have worked so hard together to make this meeting a reality.

We wish you all the best for the success of the work and for the realization of an open and frank debate, which allows us to obtain the positive and expected results, for the good of all the citizens living in the Greater Caribbean, this beautiful region of the world.

Thank you very much.