



ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)

20th MEETING OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION
Port of Spain, Trinidad-and-Tobago, 22nd-23rd November, 2012

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Statement by Mr. Mikko Pyhälä, Ambassador-at-Large to the Caribbean of Finland

Mr. Chairman, Secretary General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Finnish Government it is my honor to address the 20th meeting of the Special Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction of the ACS. I regret my inability to be present personally, only through my representative Ms. Hannele Halmeranta.

We wish to congratulate the Dominican Republic for taking care of the Chairmanship of this committee during this year, as well as Colombia for their Chairmanship in 2011.

The Caribbean nations are an integral part of Finland's foreign policy and trade relations. We entertain diplomatic relations with all the Caribbean states and we have been an observer country to the ACS since 2003. Finland has accredited an ambassador to CARICOM and to the OECS. Finland has Honorary Consuls in almost every Caribbean country. Finland is sensitive to the difficulties in the financial sphere of many Caribbean SIDS which are suffering from reduced access to concessional funding which in our opinion should be provided in case of serious disasters.

Finland's cooperation with the Caribbean countries includes ocean governance, sustainable energy, education, environmental protection and, of course, meteorology. A large part of Finland's development cooperation and humanitarian assistance in the region is devoted to the reconstruction of Haiti. Finland financed the Expert Consultation on the Operationalisation of the Caribbean Sea Commission held in Barbados in 2009, which was organized in cooperation between the ACS and the University of the West Indies. In September 2012, we were the main financier for the Third Caribbean Sustainable Energy Forum in Saint Kitts and Nevis. Finland also finances local cooperation projects in almost every Caribbean country in different areas. In addition, we have financed the CARICOM Development Fund with 300 000 euros, of which there is still money available for projects in the region. There are already two renewable energy projects running financed with the Finnish contribution, in Belize and in St. Lucia. In 2011, Finland financed the International Conference on Education for Caribbean countries in Jamaica, and intensive cooperation in education with the Caribbean countries has continued until today.

Finland has a history of supporting the Caribbean meteorological services since the early 2000. We wish to continue the good cooperation in the field of meteorology with our Caribbean partners, the ACS being the key partner, also in the future. As Finland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Erkki Tuomioja, has told his Caribbean colleagues, Finland is prepared to continue the meteorological cooperation in the Caribbean in form of a new project as continuation to the SHOCS project.

The SHOCS Project Manager Dr. Martti Heikinheimo made a presentation on the progress of the SHOCS Phase One project and the prospects for the new Phase II project. The on-going project has resulted in enhanced know-how on Multi-hazard Early Warning Systems and Disaster Risk Reduction of the meteorological services as well as in significant progress in completion of the Quality Management Systems for the Aeronautical Services required by ICAO. Furthermore, the project has included capacity assessment on future needs in development of Multi-hazard Early Warning Systems and Disaster Risk Reduction. Key priorities for further development have been identified, and these key priorities form a basis for the continuation project.

In the SHOCS II project it is planned to move from assessments to concrete implementation of methods and systems including appropriate training and consulting. The overall objective of the new project would remain the same, that is enhancing the role and strengthening the capacity of National Meteorological and Hydrological Institutions and Disaster Management Agencies in ACS Member States in the provision of early warning services and preparedness to mitigate impacts of natural disasters. The plan is to include investments on observation instruments and computer hardware as well as software to enable the service offices to handle more effectively larger amounts of meteorological information. Based on Finnish Meteorological Institute's discussions with the Caribbean partners, investments for lightning detection systems do not seem feasible at this moment - investments made in other equipment would seem more justified from a sustainability point of view.

With regard to the contractual arrangements for the new project, Finland supports continuing the Memorandum of Understanding between the Finnish Meteorological Institute and the ACS by extending the term of the MoU until the end of 2015, if acceptable to the ACS. We are confident that this meeting will endorse the new project and that we could thus move ahead in the preparation of the new project in cooperation with the ACS and other key Caribbean partners. In the new project, the activities would be situated within the same framework and as a logical continuation to the previous project with the aim of making Caribbean societies better prepared for the adverse effects of severe weather, natural disasters and harmful impacts of climate change. Also the new project will be based on including and consulting a vast number of different stakeholders in the Caribbean meteorological field. Finland is prepared to sign extension of the MoU immediately after this meeting as soon as the endorsement for the new project idea has been given. In addition to the MoU, Finland will need to make a judicially binding agreement with regard to the investment component of the proposed project, currently under consideration.

Finally, I wish to take this opportunity to thank all the stakeholders in the SHOCS project: the ACS, especially the former Secretary General, Ambassador Luis Andrade as well as the present Secretary General, Mr. Alfonso Múnera; and the Directorate for Disaster Risk Reduction including its Director Eduardo Gonzalez and his staff; all participating Caribbean countries and their meteorological services; the SHOCS Project Board, including representation from ACS, CMO, CDEMA and WMO; and the Finnish Meteorological Institute, Dr. Martti Heikinheimo, Project Manager, and Harri Pietarila, Head of Consulting Services Unit.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Luis Andrade', is positioned below the main text block.