



**Republic of Panama
Ministry of Trade and
Industries**

International Trade Negotiations Office

ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)

**26th MEETING OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRADE
DEVELOPMENT AND EXTERNAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS**

Panama City, Panama, June 23, 2011

Welcome Remarks by Mr. Alexis Pineda, on behalf of the Ministry of Trade
and Industries of Panama

Your Excellencies and Heads of Delegation of the Members States of the
Association of Caribbean States

Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps and International
Organisations accredited in Panama

Esteemed Heads of Delegation of the Countries and Observer
Organisations of the ACS,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I extend to all of you a warm welcome on behalf
of the Government of Panama. It is an honour for Panama to host and chair
this 26th Meeting of the Special Committee on Trade Development and
External Economic Relations.

Having accepted to serve as Chairman of the Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations of the Association in January of this year, Panama has been mindful of the importance of promoting its trade and investment relations with the countries of the Greater Caribbean.

Thus, our Trade Integration Agenda places tremendous importance on strengthening these relations, which in practice, has already borne fruit, such as the recent completion of trade negotiations with the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and we have also made strides in efforts to hold trade negotiations with the remaining countries of the Caribbean. I would like to remind you that Panama already has trade arrangements with all of Central America, Mexico, Colombia, Dominican Republic and Cuba, which are all members of the ACS.

We are convinced that the actions and initiatives for the gradual reduction of obstacles to trade and investment; the schemes proposed for special and differential treatment for Greater Caribbean economies; the identification of ways in which to promote the ACS Region in other regional initiatives; and the strengthening of trade capacities, elements of the Work Programme that we propose to develop under the purview of this Committee, will boost trade convergence among the countries of the Greater Caribbean and promote new opportunities to expand and deepen the trade in goods and services and investment for this region.

I want to stress that the promotion of a logistical and multimodal service platform for trade development and promotion, trade facilitation and competitiveness for the Region will be the core issues of our Work Programme. Furthermore and in view of the fact that there are few spaces in the existing FTA's to promote trade among the countries of the Region, we will encourage actions to move forward with the establishment of unilateral tariff preferences that would favour participation from those countries whose percentage of trade with the region requires as such.

We will promote the convening of Forums that would contribute to interaction from the business community, as well as activities to boost our countries' capabilities in the area of negotiation. The deepening of transparency via mechanisms that would afford trade operators access to information, which would promote flexible, secure and efficient trade in the Region, are also priority activities outlined in the Work Programme that we propose to develop.

We will maintain close communication with other international organisations in order to foster co-operation and increased trade convergence in the Greater Caribbean region.

It would be remiss of me to not mention that Panama has served the world throughout its history as a trade bridge and facilitator, thereby transforming itself into a point of reference for international trade. Let's maintain a logistical and multimodal platform with the Panama Canal, as the cornerstone of our logistical development, which could boost trade within

the Region even further and serve as a link with other regions. We have also established a network of trade agreements with both regional partners and others outside the region. We enjoy macroeconomic stability, economic growth and the development of important infrastructural projects, which, from our perspective, will support the task that we propose.

Nevertheless, we are aware that in order to make significant advancements according to this Work Programme, it will be essential to have the commitment of all members, which should at least be reflected in proactive and ongoing participation, in addition to which, arduous work on our part, as Chairman of this Committee will also be crucial.

Finally, I reiterate to you a most cordial welcome to Panama, I thank you for your participation and I wish you great success in your efforts

Thank you very much.