

UPCOMING
ACTIVITIES OF
THE TRADE
DIRECTORATE:

- Working Group on Customs Facilitation—January 23rd, 2013, Port of Spain
- Working Group on Business Visas—January 25, 2013, Port of Spain
- Regional Symposium on Tourism, SME Development and Entrepreneurial Strengthening in the Caribbean
- Promoting E-Regulations through ACS-UNCTAD cooperation

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HAITIAN MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY CHAIRS THE XXVII SPECIAL COMMITTEE MEETING ON TRADE

On July 11 and 12, 2012, Minister of Trade and Investment of the Republic of Haiti, Wilson Laleau, opened and presided over the XXVII Special Committee Meeting on Trade Development and External Economic Relations, at the ACS Headquarters, Port of Spain, Trinidad.

In his opening remarks, Minister Laleau highlighted the possibilities for economic growth in the Greater Caribbean Region. He noted that the ACS Region “represents a total market of 237 million persons, with a GDP estimated at US\$500 billion and an annual trade value of just over \$US 180 billion”; this he said in addition to Caribbean countries’ similar (*historical and political*) profiles opens many doors for growth in coming years. Among topics discussed during the opening ceremony was the intensification of trade facilitation processes in the region. These processes, he said, must be thoroughly considered, analysed, proposed and implemented in the best interest of all Member States, “Trade facilitation, smooth trade flows and the free movement of persons and goods have always boosted and stimulated economic dynamism”, it is therefore crucial that Caribbean countries negotiate within the region, those conditions that favour the implementation of such processes in the shortest possible timeframe. The disparity that exists among various custom systems

of the Caribbean region, a major focus of the XXVI Special Committee Meeting, Trade, held in June 2011 in Panama City, was another issue brought to the attention of Member



From right:
Minister of Trade and Industry of Haiti, H.E. Wilson Laleau
ACS Secretary General :
H.E. Alfonso Munera
ACS Trade Director: Ariadna Perez

States. Minister Laleau encouraged countries to work towards achieving the creation of a free trade economic area and the free movement of persons, and also gave his assurance that the Republic of Haiti welcomes this idea. He further stated that Haiti attaches great importance to the

South-South cooperation which allows developing countries to share knowledge, skills, expertise and resources to meet their development goals through concerted efforts. This can boost the Haitian economy not only by strengthening the regional economy and attracting foreign investors, he said, but also by “creating sustainable employment, reducing poverty and generating wealth”. He indicated that the Government of Haiti’s intention is to try to achieve and maintain a growth rate of 9% from the end of 2012.

In light of this, ACS Secretary General, H.E. Alfonso Munera, appealed to Member Countries to take advantage of the space that is the ACS, in order to strengthen co-operation ties and to continue building the foundation necessary to integrate and consolidate the Greater Caribbean as a Region.

During the course of the Meeting, The Haitian delegation also proposed a project to Member States “Champion Products” within the framework of trade liberalization and special treatment for the Region’s signature products. Emphasis was also placed on the Plan of action of the Trade Committee presented at the XXVII Meeting in preparation for the V Summit of Heads of State/Government to be held next year, in Haiti.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS DISCUSS EXISTING TRADE OPPORTUNITIES IN THE GREATER CARIBBEAN REGION

The ACS offered a platform during the XXVII SCT for Regional and International Experts to identify and discuss existing Trade opportunities within the Greater Caribbean Region. Participating in discussions were CARICOM, Central American Integration System (SICA), Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), Latin-American System (SELA), Caribbean Export Development and the International Trade Centre (ITC).

Some core points for the promotion of

trade and investment in the Region are new sector and emerging markets, promotion and innovation of new technologies, cultural cooperation, Inter-Secretariat Cooperation and promotion of synergies. They called specifically to “set regional priorities that must be strongly linked to the available resources and capacities in the zone” and to “take advantage of the investments on research and projects the organisations have al-

ready developed in different areas”. The Dominican Republic Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, H.E. Jose Serulle emphasized the “Cultural Industry” as a source of greater business experience, which can help many communities launch business development programs in this context. The ACS encourages countries to take advantage of resources present in Caribbean countries in order to make all the experience achieved through the years profitable for all.

ACS-UNCTAD CONTINUES TO EXPAND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF E-REGULATIONS IN THE GREATER CARIBBEAN REGION



Above: Map of countries with E-regulations in orange. Photo source: <http://www.eregulations.org/>

The XXVII Special Committee Meeting saw the participation of UNCTAD Regional Representative Nelson Perez, who presented the E-Regulations programme to the ACS Membership present.

E-Regulations, an online business facilitation system of the UNCTAD has been implemented in 6 out of 28 ACS countries to date.

In countries where it has been implemented, E-regulations has facilitated expedited visa procedures, simplification of import procedures, and the establishment of an electronic consultation system for accessing

information and import requirements. In the case of Guatemala, for example, the number of steps for sole traders to register a business online has been reduced to 8 from 22. E-regulations therefore allows businesses worldwide to obtain accurate and efficient business registration information of Caribbean countries online. "Lack of access to information remains one of the major obstacles to Trade Development" according to the ACS Trade Director, Ariadna Perez.

E-regulations therefore combats this by increasing domestic and foreign investment through "providing information

on the business environment and on key emerging business opportunities". Another advantage is "Smart Solutions" a platform used to promote intergovernmental cooperation, in particular, South-South cooperation.

The Trade Committee's Plan of Action for the upcoming year will continue to place great emphasis on promoting initiatives aimed at reducing obstacles to trade in the region through increasing awareness of E-Regulations and its benefits for Trade in the ACS Region"

See www.eregulations.org for more information.

REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS EXPRESS THE NEED FOR GREATER INTER-SECRETARIAT COOPERATION

Information exchange and Inter-Secretariat cooperation is crucial for generating opportunities throughout the Greater Caribbean region, this was the view of OECS representative, Virginia Paul during the Dialogue on Identifying Existing Opportunities for Trade among ACS Member Countries in the XXVII SCT.

According to Paul, it is important that information be exchanged efficiently to avoid duplicating regional efforts and to allow Regional Organisations to focus their actions on common projects. For this reason, the role of the ACS as a zone of cooperation was

recognized as crucial, given the critical juncture at which the Caribbean is currently positioned.

The Caricom Representative David Lord also emphasized the need for Inter-Secretariat collaboration through increased awareness of trade agreements, functional co-operation and partnerships, that will serve to enhance emerging economic sectors. Lord further highlighted that by promoting synergies and links among regional organizations, the Region can "evaluate possible opportunities that may be implemented around the CARIFORUM-EU EPA", an

agreement which can, with improved Inter-Secretariat cooperation, promote trade in services in the Greater Caribbean. SELA representative, Juan Acuña also touched on the positive impact of bringing countries together into Forums to guarantee the proper dissemination of information. It was therefore proposed by the Dominican Republic that a meeting be convened in the framework of the 5th Summit to be held in Haiti using the experiences gained from the XXVII SCT as a reference to discuss strategic issues related to trade development and regional cooperation and information exchange.

"Inter-Secretariat collaboration through increased awareness of trade agreements, functional co-operation and partnerships, that will serve to enhance emerging economic sectors."

TRADE FACILITATION DIVIDED INTO TWO WORKING GROUPS



Following from the XXVII Special Committee Meeting, it was established that the working group for trade facilitation as indicated in the DTDEER Work Programme 2011-2013, would be divided into two categories: Customs Facilitation and Business Visas.

The first Working Group will comprise Customs Officials at the technical level

from each Member State and Associate Member States of the ACS, and/or other relevant authorities. The main expected output from the Working Group on Trade Facilitation is a set of recommendations to the Special Committee on Trade to facilitate the simplification, and where possible harmonization of customs procedures.

The second working group

will be focused on identifying criteria for the granting of special visa to business persons of the Greater Caribbean Region.

The first Meeting of the Working Group on Customs Facilitation has been convened for January 23, 2013 and the Working Group on Business Visas on January 25th 2012, both to be held at the ACS Secretariat.

ALLOWING ACCESS TO GUARANTEES FOR SME EMPOWERMENT



Participants of the SMEs Guarantees Support Systems Seminar held at the ACS Secretariat, July 2011

The Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) has made a big step in bringing to the ACS Secretariat and its Member states, one of the mechanisms geared to empower small and medium enterprises through financing.

The access to guarantees and guarantee systems in the region were examined by experts on the subject such as Ibero-American Guarantee Network (REGAR) and Guarantee Fund for Loans to the Small Industry (FOGAPI).

“One of the most recommended actions to facilitate SME access to credit is the strengthening of guarantee systems in the

region” said Mr. German Caires Head of Projects for SELA who stressed the need to make more efficient the access to this invaluable tool to new and experienced entrepreneurs in Caribbean countries.

During the meetings, participants such as the FNG, CARICRIS, FOMIN, CARICOM, the Caribbean Development Bank and the International Financial Centre of Trinidad and Tobago acknowledged the benefits of being provided with the information in order to generate locally, the impact needed to warranty SME sustainable operations.

“Gender inequality is an obstacle to progress, a barrier in the path of human development. If development is not engendered, it is endangered”

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH SME DEVELOPMENT

Research undertaken by the ACS Trade Directorate showed that the gender gap in education and employment prevents the economic growth of countries and therefore represents a major obstacle to Trade.

The International Trade Center (ITC) has also found that the vast majority of the world’s poor are women which raises the question “Does gender inequality make a difference?” According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) “Gender inequality is an obstacle to

progress, a barrier in the path of human development. If development is not engendered, it is endangered”

Small and Medium Enterprises, and in particular women, represent important accelerators of economic growth. The main barriers faced by women in establishing and growing SMEs are: access to training and networks, access to markets and access to finance. By allowing the empowerment and supporting the entrepreneurial vision of women and youth, we will be able to

improve productivity and development outcomes for the next generation, as well as make institutions more representative, in the medium term.

The progress of women entrepreneurs is growing and it is therefore necessary to design public policies that support the development of SMEs in all countries. The Association of Caribbean States is committed to continuing with the work on Women and SMEs in order to make significant advances in this area for the Greater Caribbean Region as a whole.

REGIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON TOURISM, SME DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURIAL STRENGTHENING IN THE GREATER CARIBBEAN

A major upcoming activity of the Trade Directorate is the “Regional Symposium on Tourism, SME Development and Entrepreneurial Strengthening in the Greater Caribbean”, a project to be undertaken in collaboration with the ACS Directorate of Sustainable Tourism.

The Symposium aims to increase competitiveness not only in cruise ship tourism, a niche for generating foreign exchange, but also to maximize opportunities for

women in this sector by allowing them to increase earnings through providing services.

Director of Sustainable Tourism, Gloria De Mees outlined details of the project during the XXVII Special Committee Meeting on Trade, which was well received by Members present. Ambassador of Panama, H.E. Arline Gonzales Costa expressed interest in cooperating with the ACS in this activity and SELA representative, Juan Acuña indicated that his organiza-

tion is also willing to share information with the ACS regarding the financing and policies for women in the Region. Within the context of cruise ship tourism, the social importance of coastal communities being organized and deriving benefits from this activity as well as the creation of a specialized organization to support the cultural and entrepreneurial development of women were also discussed. The symposium is scheduled to be held in the first quarter of 2013.



Royal Caribbean Cruise Ship anchored off the coast of Labadee, Haiti
Photo source: www.guardian.co.uk



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About the ACS

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The Association of Caribbean States is an organization for consultation, cooperation and concerted action in trade, transport, sustainable tourism and natural disasters in the Greater Caribbean. Its Member States are Antigua & Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad & Tobago and Venezuela. Its Associate Members are Aruba, France on behalf of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, St. Barthélemy & Saint Martin, and Curacao.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF TRADE

Directorate of Trade Development and External Economic Relations

The Trade Directorate is fully committed to fostering cooperation and integration by uniting the efforts of ACS Member States and Associate Members to build and consolidate an enhanced economic space for trade and investment within the Greater Caribbean. As such, the Directorate of Trade continues to work in the interest of Member states and Associate members for the realization of projects and activities which will further strengthen External Economic Relations, and redound great benefits for our Greater Caribbean Region. Focusing on areas of priority to the Region, and the merging of positions in areas of common interest, and convergence are vital for the accomplishment of this objective.

It is our belief that in order to help create an enhanced economic

space, it is necessary to continue promoting the participation of the business community; the importance of transport in developing trade ties; offering incentives and deepening



Center: Chair of the Special Committee on Trade, H.E. Minister Wilson Laleau. From Left: Trade Adviser, Kariyma Baltimore, Research Assistant, Ariadna Casas, Trade Director, Ariadna Perez, Trade Secretary, Nazia Mohammed

intra-regional trade among ACS member countries. It is vital to create trade support mechanisms aimed at enhancing the strategic position of private enterprise, as well as a suitable mechanism for the exchange of information among the economic actors in the various countries belonging to the Greater Caribbean, with the intent of improving their ability to penetrate both regional and international markets.

Opportunities multiply as they are seized, the opportunities ahead are numerous, let us take hold of them, and continue to build an advanced and competitive trade and investment environment within the Greater Caribbean Region.