

ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES
DIRECTORATE OF TRADE DEVELOPMENT AND EXTERNAL ECONOMIC
RELATIONS
REPORT OF ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

The Directorate of Trade Development and External Economic Relations, herein after referred to as the Directorate of Trade is charged with the responsibility of fostering cooperation and integration by uniting the efforts of Association of Caribbean States (ACS) Member States and Associate Members to build and consolidate an enhanced economic space for trade and investment in the Greater Caribbean.

Within the parameters of this mandate the Directorate of Trade has executed a series of programmes throughout 2012 - 2013 towards fulfilling its objectives, and creating this enhanced economic space and increased trade and investment among Members. The following represents a detailed report of activities undertaken since the last report presented to the XXVII meeting of the Special Committee on Trade held on the July 11 and 12, 2012:

I MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP OF THE TRADE COMMITTEE ON
CUSTOMS FACILITATION

The Directorate of Trade executing the mandate from the XXVII Special Committee Meeting, held the I Meeting of the Working Group on Customs Facilitation on 23rd January, 2013. Discussions addressed pertinent matters concerning the simplification, harmonization and sharing of customs information between Member States. A key recommendation was the use of a Memorandum of Understanding to govern the exchange of information and interface between Member States.

The Working Group agreed that:

- The Directorate of Trade would consult with the Legal Advisor of the ACS about what legal instrument should be employed to facilitate the exchange of customs-related information amongst Members.

I MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP OF THE TRADE COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS VISAS

The I Meeting of the Working Group on Business Visas was held on 25th January 2013 to provide a forum for discussion on strategies that can be implemented in order to achieve an ideal environment for trade and investment, with emphasis on the ease of obtaining business visas. The meeting also served to identify existing obstacles in the bureaucratic procedure for obtaining the relevant documentation permitting the business and investment community to legally operate in the ACS Region.

The Working Group recommended, amongst others:

- To clearly define a business person and an investor, and give a detailed explanation of the type of activities he/ she can engage in, as well as the services the individual is entitled to.
- To marry the immigration and trade policies so that administrative procedures coincide with amount of time business people and investors take to conduct their transactions.
- For all Member States to send their immigration information to the ACS to be compiled, tabulated and published on the ACS website.
- To keep the ACS abreast with any changes to the immigration code.
- For links to embassy and immigration authorities' website of respective Member States to be available on the ACS website.

V Summit of the Heads of State and/or Governments of the Association of Caribbean States

The Heads of State and /or Government, as well as the participating delegations unanimously adopted the Declaration and Plan of Action of the V Summit of Heads of State and/or Government of the Association of Caribbean States.

The Leaders ratified the founding principles of the Association, reaffirming that the ACS continues to serve as an ideal forum for consultation, co-operation and concerted action in its areas of work. This represented the fulfilment of the goal of the Summit which was to launch the process to revitalise the Association of Caribbean States for a stronger and more united Greater Caribbean.

Regarding the thematic area of Trade, the Leaders mandated through the Plan of Action work in the following areas:

TRADE DEVELOPMENT AND EXTERNAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS

2.1 Elimination and Reduction of Obstacles and Challenges to Trade Facilitation within the Greater Caribbean Region. This project will focus on holding Technical Meetings of the Working Groups on Customs Facilitation and the Issuance of Business Visas; and the promotion of the implementation of the UNCTAD E-Regulations Programme. The expected results would be the Signing of an Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding to govern the exchange, sharing, and interface of customs information and procedures, with particular reference to the advance electronic remission of merchandise declarations for export, and other areas of interest among Member States, as well as the creation of an information portal to facilitate access to information on the movement of Business Persons.

2.2 Convening of an Annual Business Forum of the Greater Caribbean, as well as the Forum of Trade Promotion Organizations. With these two Fora, it is anticipated that trade, investment, and the exchange of knowledge will be promoted among businessmen, business-women and entrepreneurs of the Greater Caribbean. They will also encourage discussions on relevant topics on the Region's Trade Agenda aimed at expanding and strengthening trade relations.

2.3 The Promotion of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the Greater Caribbean. This project is designed mainly to create and expand job opportunities, and alleviate unemployment in the countries of the ACS. To this end, an annual seminar will be convened involving expert entities and MSMEs of the region, to discuss the importance of the sector and identify opportunities for development in ACS Member States. Based on the outcomes of this seminar, a document will be developed for the exchange of good practices.

2.4 The Empowering of Women Through Trade through the holding of an Annual Seminar in order to promote from a gender perspective, the strengthening of capabilities of women entrepreneurs, their economic autonomy and provide the gender sensitive tools necessary to address matters related to the challenges and obstacles of managing MSMEs, resulting in the increased capacity and skills of women entrepreneurs and small business owners. By means of this Seminar, it is anticipated that knowledge will be acquired in respect of avenues for accessing finance, and new technologies.

2.5 Promotion of the convergence and deepening of Trade within the ACS through new schemes. Update the study on the actual and potential flow of trade in the ACS Region, and the identification, compilation and execution of existing and new related cooperation activities within the Region.

2.6 The strengthening of the Caribbean Development Bank (CARIBANK) to expand its participation and activities in all countries of the ACS. In this regard, Mexico is willing to collaborate with the Caribbean Bank to seek the necessary tools and/or mechanisms through the Yucatan Agreement for the financing of infrastructural plans or work in the Greater Caribbean.

II MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP OF THE TRADE COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS VISAS

The II Meeting of the Working Group on Business Visas was held on 4th September 2013. The Executive Summary Report of this meeting will be presented for the consideration of Member States.

II MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP OF THE TRADE COMMITTEE ON CUSTOMS FACILITATION

The II Meeting of the Working Group on Customs Facilitation was held on 5th September 2013. The Executive Summary Report of this Meeting will be presented for the consideration of Member States.

DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE BIENNIUM 2014 -2015

The Directorate of Trade will present for the consideration of Member States a new draft work programme for the Biennium 2014 -2015 outlining proposed projects, activities, and areas of work for this time period. This draft work programme will be presented in detail at a later time on the meeting's agenda.

TECHNICAL COOPERATION EFFORTS

The Trade Directorate has also been pursuing avenues for increased collaboration with other organizations to further advance the work programme to the benefit of the member states. The Directorate has held discussions with agencies on areas of convergence for all parties. Meetings thus far have been held with:

- The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC).
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).
- SELA
- Caribbean Export Development Agency
- World Custom Organization (WCO)

- World Intellectual Property Office (WIPO)
- World Trade Organization (WTO)

CONCLUSION

The Directorate of Trade Development and External Economic Relations wishes to convey its gratitude to the Republic of Colombia, for its leadership thus far in the Special Committee on Trade, the Trade Directorate also thanks all members states and associate members for your cooperation and support.

The Trade Directorate is fully committed to the consolidation of an enhanced economic space for trade and investment within the Greater Caribbean. As such, the Directorate 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.

We believe 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 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 members of the Association in the different countries belonging to the Greater Caribbean with the intent of improving their ability to penetrate the various regional markets.

The opportunities ahead are numerous, let us take hold of them, and continue to build the trade and investment environment within the Greater Caribbean Region.