

**Remarks by President of the Council of States and Ministers of the Republic Of Cuba,
Raul Castro Ruz, at the closing session of the 7th Summit of the Association of
Caribbean States**

Excellencies and Honorable Heads of States and/or Government,

Delegates, Observers and Guests,

Esteemed Ambassador Alfonso Munera Cavadia, Secretary General of ACS,

First of all we would like to convey our sympathy and solidarity to the family of the great boxing champion Muhammad Ali; to the American people and particularly to the African American community, whose rights he always defended; and, to the international sports community. We shall never forget his chivalry and ethic, his rejection of war and defense of peace; his respect for and friendship with comrade Fidel, and with that great Cuban and Caribbean boxer Teofilo Stevenson, the son of a citizen of Saint Vincent, and grandson of a citizen of Saint Kitts and Nevis on his mother side.

The Summit ending today shows the capacity of our region to sustain a dialogue, and coordinate positions on the common problems and challenges we face, and to persevere in our quest for solutions appropriate to the conditions, necessities and priorities of the region.

The documents and decisions adopted are proof of that. We have reached the necessary consensus to declare our stance on sensitive issues of common interest.

The recently approved Declaration of Havana confirms the validity of the seminal principles of our Association as a mechanism of consultation, coordination and concerted action for the adoption of common positions by the Caribbean States, Countries and Territories, and to promote integration, as reflected in the Constitutive Covenant.

We have approved concrete activities in the framework of the Plan of Action for the next three years, on a variety of issues of high priority to all.

However, we still have much to do, and great challenges to confront, such as threats to international peace and security, the impact of the global economic and financial crisis, and the consequences of climate change.

The discussions held here evidence our Association's necessity and capability to deal with major issues affecting the region, which is indispensable to continue making progress toward integration and cooperation, since these basically depend on the political will of governments, and on common development priorities.

We have reaffirmed the significance of applying the postulates of the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, signed by Heads of State and/or Government in January 2014, to relations between our countries and with other partners and counterparts.

Peace and stability, the defense of the interests of our peoples, and the exercise of sovereignty and self-determination, without foreign interference, are essential elements to advance toward the integration and cooperation goals that we have set ourselves.

The current juncture makes us to wonder, how can we consolidate what has been achieved so far and keep moving on? Due to the experience of the lost decade, we are all aware that a new neoliberal wave, which dismantles inclusive social policies; increases poverty, inequality and market deregulation; neglects environmental protection, and diminishes the role of the State will prevent us from fulfilling the objectives of regional integration and cooperation that we aspire to conquer.

But, Cuba will continue working from the presidency of the Council of Ministers of the Association, with the purpose of strengthening this mechanism and joining forces to confront collective challenges.

Our Association was established with the objective of bringing the entire Caribbean family together, including territories which are part of European States. We recognize the contribution they have all made, as well as the French Republic and the Netherlands, in their status of Associate Members. We hope they shall continue working along the same lines, and that other Caribbean territories also join us.

We appreciate the participation and contribution of nations and organizations with Observers status, whose number keeps mounting, thus showing the interest that the Caribbean arouses all over the world.

Allow me to again underline the contribution of Ambassador Alfonso Munera Cavadia to the bolstering of the Secretariat and the labors of the ACS during his term in office. From next August that effort will be guided by Ambassador June Soomer, whom we congratulate again for her election and reiterate our support.

Likewise, we appreciate the presence of you all in Havana and your commitment to the advancement and consolidation of the Association of Caribbean States.

Thank you.