

Your Excellency, Mr. Raúl Castro Ruz
President of the State Council of the Republic of Cuba
Honourable Heads of State and Government of the Countries of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS)
Your Excellency, Bruno Rodríguez
Minister of Foreign Affairs and current Chairman of the Ministerial Council of the ACS
Your Excellency, Ambassador Alfonso Múnera Cavadía
Secretary General of the ACS
Distinguished Delegates of ACS States

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a pleasure to return to this sister nation of Cuba and I am truly honoured to do so on this occasion, representing my country in the Association of Caribbean States.

These days, the newspaper headlines are reporting that the Caribbean and Latin American region and the world as a whole, are facing significant challenges, as well as serious emergencies.

However, it is also true that last year has given us reasons for optimism, moderate and critical optimism, but by no means less real.

As you are well aware, on April 22, 175 States from around the world ratified the Paris Agreement to tackle climate change.

It was Earth Day and on that occasion, in the end we agreed to care for the Earth and take the necessary steps so that our children could to live here safely.

This is especially important for us Caribbean countries since the effects of climate change are a challenge to our very survival.

We always believe that with a sense of shared responsibility, those countries whose development and consumption habits have produced changes in the weather, must contribute voluntarily and provide technical, technological and financial support to the more vulnerable countries.

And note that I'm not speaking about financial assistance alone. The problem that we face is so complex that technical and technological cooperation are equally important since, without these, financial assistance would prove inadequate.

Thus, we are delighted to see that several nations whose leaders we have been calling on to accept their responsibility, have finally shown that they have the political will necessary to reverse this dangerous trend.

And it is also this political will that forms the basis of our second reason for optimism in the international arena.

I'm referring to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Objectives and 169 goals, which constitute a roadmap for responding to the most pressing challenges facing humanity, such as hunger, poverty and social inequality.

Among other things, I trust that the adoption of these objectives will allow us Caribbean States to arrive at a standardised evaluation system that is necessary to compare experiences and determine which initiatives would be most successful in our regional context.

My Friends,

If we look at this regional context, we also find reasons for optimism. For example, the terms proposed in the Declaration of Havana regarding the negative impact of Climate Change on the Caribbean Sea clearly indicate that we also have the political will to take action.

We therefore reiterate the call for consensus on a definition and definitive international recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a "Special Area" in the context of sustainable development.

As outlined in this declaration, our region is facing many challenges today. It is evident that the scope of these common challenges is different for each member of the Association, given the asymmetries that exist in terms of size and resources.

And in light of that specifically, the regional approach and action are essential in order to mobilise the efforts that would allow us to respond adequately to each of those challenges.

As a result, it is imperative that we continue to strengthen the ACS. This strengthening should not only be expressed in political declarations, but it should be brought to fruition in the concrete contributions that should be made by all its members, based on their possibilities, so as to guarantee the development and implementation of strategies and projects for the common good.

In addition, the Dominican Republic reiterates its support for the initiatives being undertaken by the ACS to foster regional trade, through the gradual reduction and elimination of obstacles to trade, and to also make air and maritime transport more efficient.

We also support the project on the movement of business persons to facilitate intra-regional interaction and linking of trade and investments.

Nevertheless, we understand that these trade initiatives should be complemented with a preferential tariff scheme among ACS countries, which would take into consideration the asymmetries of the economies of the region, thereby ensuring fair and equitable relations.

As you will recall, efforts were already undertaken in this regard during the early years of the ACS, but at that time, they were put on the back burner due to broken down hemispheric negotiations.

However, we understand that the current situation is very different and opens up a new window of opportunity for us.

In that respect, we share Colombia's proposal to create a Working Group to examine the feasibility of establishing tariff preferences among ACS countries, in order to support the expansion and diversification of trade.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the extraordinary support received from brother countries like Mexico and Colombia for various projects being carried out by the ACS and which have facilitated active participation from representatives from all countries.

I would like to also express our heartfelt satisfaction and recognition of the excellent work done by Ambassador Alfonso Múnera Cavadía. Today the Secretary gives us a stronger Secretariat, which allows us to see the future of our Association through optimistic eyes. So Mr. Secretary, thank you for your great work.

We also support, appreciate and anticipate the same achievements of Ambassador June Soomer in her appointment as the new Secretary, and we announce here and now that she can count on the fervent and decisive support of the Dominican Republic in exercising her duties.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, I wish to reiterate our country's commitment to the initiatives geared toward natural disaster prevention and risk management. The onus is on all of us to ensure that the work carried out in the region is consolidated and advanced in an increasingly coordinated fashion.

Let's make the Caribbean a global reference for climate adaptation and risk prevention, and also for advancement in the sustainable development goals. Let's prove that when we're guided by the interests of our people, we can certainly inspire genuine change.

