ACS IN THE GREATER CARIBBEAN

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ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES
ASOCIACION DE ESTADOS DEL CARIBE
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The ACS was born on July 24, 1994, in Cartagena de Indias, comprising twenty-four Member States and four Associated States. The creation of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) is the result of the work of a group of visionaries during the decade of 1980-1990. With a deep understanding of the difficult and complex international circumstances at the time, they conceived this dialogue space for cooperation among the countries of the Greater Caribbean. The idea was enthusiastically welcomed by all the governments in this region who decisively contributed to its establishment.

In the context of the contemporary world, marked by global political power decentralisation, by severe crises in several countries of the European Union, by the strengthening of the integration and cooperation processes of the nations of Latin American and the Caribbean, the ACS is today, more than ever, a powerful tool, unique under the current circumstances in which its Member States and Associate Members can freely and independently dialogue, collectively coordinate and cooperate on vital matters that affect all of us as citizens of the Greater Caribbean. Some of these matters must be addressed without delay; matters like protecting ourselves against the critical vulnerability of the Caribbean islands and coasts continuously and increasingly threatened by natural disasters, as well as safeguarding our Caribbean Sea, a significant life blood of our existence, and to work together to achieve a better sea and air connectivity to facilitate trade, communication and necessary cultural growth between the Caribbean and Latin America.

In this regard, it is necessary to build upon the achievements that the ACS has been able to accomplish so far despite many difficulties. As never before, we have a cooperation platform working very well at a regional level in matters regarding disaster prevention and capable of undertaking big macro projects in that area. Additionally, we have made significant progress in coordinating efforts to develop common programs in the area of sustainable tourism, a significant and strategic activity for all the Greater Caribbean countries. The ACS is also the most ideal hemispheric organisation in which all the actors of the region work to develop joint production, investment, and trade initiatives and formulate policies and work instruments, aimed at protecting and improving the livelihood of approximately 250 million people. We have taken important steps regarding connectivity to facilitate the dialogue among the airlines in the region. I am confident that we will be able to progress much more in cooperation programs in the areas of education, culture, science, and technology.

History has taught me that there are processes that mature at a slower pace than others especially in the midst of greater challenges. It is not an easy task at all to have nations dialogue and share common interest projects when through centuries they have been apart, and are used to regarding each other with indifference, and that are separated by powerful barriers such as habits developed by a colonial past and different languages.

But I have also learned from history that faith in ideals, patience to overcome difficulties, enthusiasm to move forward with optimism, and a good dose of pragmatism overcome all obstacles regardless of how powerful they may be.

A simple testament to this is the fact and collective outcomes of the V Summit of the Heads of State and/or Government of the ACS which met last April in Pétion Ville, Haiti. In this Summit, they expressed their decision to strengthen the ACS by acknowledging that this is the space we have created for us all to facilitate more effective and productive cooperation in the Greater Caribbean in the areas of progress and general welfare of the countries within it.

We have approved a Plan of Action which constitutes the guide of our daily work. In it we have contemplated six areas, which are: Cooperation in Sustainable Tourism, Trade and Investment, Disaster Risk Reduction, Transportation, protection of the Caribbean Sea, and in Education, Culture, Science and Technology. We have established different development projects and specific activities in each area; which will be discussed in future articles.

The Association of Caribbean States is the most ambitious space of dialogue and cooperation that exists in the Greater Caribbean. It comprises all the Caribbean islands, all the Central American countries, Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico. Together, we are able to join forces to solve many of our problems; the only thing we need to do is to collectively apply our skills towards mutual goals that underpin the foundations of the development of our people.