**Regional Tourism Authorities to convene in La Antigua Guatemala for annual Meeting of the ACS Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism**

The Directorate of Sustainable Tourism at the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala and the Guatemala Tourism Board (Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo - INGUAT), will be hosting the 25th Meeting of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism (SCST-25) from the 22nd to 23rd May, 2014, in the colonial city of La Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala.

Cognizant of the importance of supporting and sharing knowledge on sustainable tourism best practices among the countries of the region, the Directorate will incorporate, as the first component to the SCST-25, an ACS Workshop on Best Practices and Lessons Learnt in Sustainable Tourism.

The workshop was designed to showcase Sustainable Destination Management initiatives within the Region, and also provide a platform for countries to share their experiences. This Workshop will not only gather high level technical experts and tourism leaders to discuss and share information and experiences in the area of sustainable tourism, but it will also present an ideal arena for the convening of the First Meeting of the Steering Committee for the Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Greater Caribbean (STZC) since its entry into force on November 6th, 2013.

The Steering Committee functions as a technical team governing quality assurance and compliance to standards of the STZC destination selection and evaluation process. This is an essential component of the Regional Cooperation Mechanism project which supports the establishment of the Zone, and includes implementation of the STZC sustainable tourism indicators in each ACS Member Country. The Steering Committee comprises of Academics, Sustainability experts and Tourism professionals from the Greater Caribbean Region, supported with technical advice from regional and

international organizations working in the area of Sustainable Tourism.

The Meetings in Guatemala will be chaired by the President of the Martinique Committee on Tourism, the Honourable Mrs. Karine Roy-Camille. Additionally, high-level officials and tourism authorities will be present to discuss matters pertaining to the efforts of the ACS in relation to the sustainable development of tourism in the Greater Caribbean.

Held annually, the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism brings together the representatives of the ACS Member States to discuss issues and projects related to the sustainable development of tourism in the Greater Caribbean. The main focus of this gathering is the facilitation of a mutually beneficial multi-lateral dialogue aimed at strengthening cooperation mechanisms in this most critical area of sustainable tourism given the Greater Caribbean's dependence on this industry as a source of revenue, especially for the small-island developing states.

The Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism is a technical body meant to assist in the performance of the Ministerial Council. Mandates from the Second Ordinary Meeting of the ACS Ministerial Council, which was held in Havana, Cuba December 13th, 1996 led to the inception of this body as the 'Special Committee on Tourism', as it was called back then. However, with the change of millennia came a new vision for tourism development in the Greater Caribbean region, and countries recognised the importance of planning for the future success, availability of resources and longevity of the tourism industry, thereby shifting their focus to sustainable tourism development which manifested in the re-naming of the Special Committee on Tourism to the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism at the Sixth Ordinary Meeting of ACS Ministerial Council, held in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, December 7th, 2000. This Committee therefore has a long history of working together to produce significant results in the area of sustainable tourism policy development for the Greater Caribbean. Its most highly esteemed milestone is the entry into force of the Convention and Protocol of the STZC last November which now allows the Greater Caribbean Region the opportunity to boast of being the First Sustainable Tourism Zone in the World.

With the input of the ACS countries, this 25th Meeting of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism plans to strengthen and revise the Work Programme of the ACS Directorate of Sustainable Tourism based on present-day needs of its Member States, as well as address and decide on issues and concerns affecting the regional tourism industry.

The SCST-25 Meeting will be an opportunity to follow-up on the commitments made last year in Trinidad and Tobago, which graciously hosted for the seventh time on July 16th and 17th, 2013, the 24th Meeting of the Special Committee. A high level delegation from the ACS will travel to Guatemala to participate in the meetings, comprised of the Secretary General, His Excellency Ambassador Alfonso Munera and the Director of Sustainable Tourism, Mr. Julio Orozco, a citizen of the Republic of Guatemala. Director Orozco has expressed that it will be a profound pleasure to welcome all countries of the region to Guatemala for the meetings.