XX Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council



La Antigua, Guatemala, March 10th, 2015- The city of La Antigua, Guatemala, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, welcomed the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Vice Ministers, Ambassadors and other delegations, as well as the representatives of international organisations attending the 20th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), convened on March 10, 2015.

Participating in the meeting in their capacity as Ministers of Foreign Affairs, were Wilfred Peter Elrington, of Belize; María Ángela Holguín, of Colombia; Bruno Rodríguez, of Cuba; Francine Baron, of the Commonwealth of Dominica and CARICOM Affairs; Hugo Roger Martínez Bonilla, of El Salvador; Carlos Raúl Morales Moscoso, of Guatemala; Pierre Duly Brutus, of Haiti; José Antonio Meade Kuribreña of Mexico; and Andrés Navarro García, of the Dominican Republic.

The meeting was opened by H.E. Carlos Raúl Morales Moscoso, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala and Chairman of the Ministerial Council. In his remarks, the Minister affirmed that Guatemala is striving to consolidate its relations with the rest of the region, in seeking to achieve greater economic development. He further indicated that his country is working toward increasing trade flows with the Caribbean, and highlighted in particular, sugar investments made in the Dominican Republic, as well as trade agreements with Trinidad and Tobago.

H.E. Alfonso Múnera, Secretary General of the ACS, in his opening remarks, conveyed thanks to the Guatemalan Chair for its excellent leadership throughout 2014 and added that he considered this meeting to be of tremendous significance in light of the issues that would be under discussion.

The most outstanding aspect of the meeting, in terms of the strengthening and revitalisation of the ACS, was the unanimous support expressed for the sizeable increase in its Ordinary Budget for the very first time in its 21 years of existence. Taking into account the difficulties currently being encountered by ACS member countries in general, this was a clear expression of the great importance ascribed by them to the organisation.

There was overall consensus that the Association has yielded extremely positive and concrete results for the benefit of Member Countries. Similarly, the delegations present applauded the Secretary General for his decisive leadership in the process to revitalise the Association.

In his report, the Secretary General highlighted the significant achievements of the ACS Secretariat, including the advancements made by the Directorates for Trade Development and External Economic Relations, Transport, Sustainable Tourism and Disaster Risk Reduction with respect to the Work Programme and Plan of Action of Pétion Ville, adopted during the 5th Summit of ACS Heads of State and/or Government. During his presentation, the Secretary General further pointed out that the Secretariat has fulfilled more than eighty percent of the mandates established in said Plan of Action.

In addition, the Mexican Foreign Affairs Minister outlined the progress made in the four (4) major projects approved during the Summit in Mérida, with support from the Government of Mexico. The Vice president of the INEGIS, Rolando Campos, was charged with the task of presenting the most advanced of said projects, whose action focuses on linking and strengthening 16 Caribbean islands with the United Nations Geospatial Information System.

The Cuban Foreign Minister, in his intervention, emphatically rejected the decision taken by the United States of America to declare Venezuela a threat to that country's national security. This pronouncement was echoed by the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua and the Vice Minister of Venezuela.

Subsequently, during the lunch session, the other Ministers and Heads of Delegation, in general, took the opportunity to voice their opinions on the matter. It was made clear that the ACS is not a political forum, but rather an organisation for cooperation among the countries of the Greater Caribbean, and it was unanimously agreed to indicate that it is necessary, first and foremost, to use dialogue and peaceful and legal means to strengthen democracy in Venezuela.

The Ministerial Council also considered the application submitted by the French Overseas Territory of Saint Martin to participate in its own right as an Associate Member.

During the meeting, Haiti was unanimously elected as the new Chairman of the Ministerial Council for the period 2015-2016. The following countries were also elected as Chairmen of the Special Committees: Transport, Cuba; Sustainable Tourism, Guatemala; Trade Development and External Economic Relations, Colombia; Disaster Risk Reduction, Mexico; Budget and Administration, Haiti. Serving as the Chairs of the Council of National Representatives of the Special Fund and the Caribbean Sea Commission are Guadeloupe and the Dominican Republic, respectively.

Representatives of Observer Countries, viz-a-viz: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, Finland, India, Korea, Morocco, Peru, Russia, Spain and Turkey, as well as several regional organisations, viz: the International Organization for Migration; The Panama Maritime Authority, the Central American Commission on Maritime Transport (COCATRAM), The Office of Disaster Preparedness & Management of Trinidad and Tobago (ODPM), The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), as well as the Under-Secretary for Foreign Relations of the State Department of Puerto Rico, Mr. Rafael Juarbe Pagán, were also in attendance.

The meeting concluded with the acceptance speech of the Chair of the Ministerial Council, delivered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Haiti, during which he voiced the commitment to strengthen the processes for cooperation among the countries of the Greater Caribbean, which has always inspired and motivated Haiti. Along that vein, the Minister reflected on the profound significance of promoting the strategy of dialogue and joint effort by Central America and the Island Caribbean, as

well as on the increased participation from Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico in Wider Caribbean cooperation.