ACS Cooperation Conference Brings Region Together to Discuss Cooperation Post-COVID-19

MEDIA RELEASE

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Port-of-Spain The COVID-19 pandemic has made it vital for countries of the region to engage in multilateral cooperation, so says Secretary General of the Association of Caribbean States, Dr. June Soomer. Secretary General Soomer was speaking at the Fourth International Cooperation Conference "Coordinated cooperation as a driver for response to the crisis in the region", organised by the Directorate for Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation of the ACS, which brought together over 35 countries around the Caribbean and sustainable development partners from around the world.

Chair of the Ministerial Council of the ACS Hugo Francisco River Fernández, Vice Minister for Economic Affairs and International Cooperation of the Dominican Republic agrees that it is an ideal time for collaborative work in the region. "Everyone has been impacted by the pandemic which has had unprecedented impact on our economies. Many of our countries rely on tourism which is an activity that has almost disappeared in our region. So we must come together under the ACS which provides a variety of options for recovery."

Secretary General Soomer says that the ACS focal areas – sustainable tourism, trade, transport, environment and the Caribbean Sea must be the focus for "There has been evolution of the substantive focus on South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation from technical and economic cooperation to embracing the three dimensions of sustainable development – environmental, economic and social. All development partnership activities undertaken by the ACS, on behalf of the Greater Caribbean, must support and improve the impact of national development plans and their efforts to fulfil national sustainable development commitments."

Sub-regional director for the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean Diane Quarless, says that countries with economies linked to services are particularly affected. She notes that the Caribbean tourism sector has been seriously impacted and its contribution to GDP has been reduced by 67% and there has been a 64% decrease in the number of

people formally employed. Ms. Quarless, also mentions that food security, social well-being and keeping economies afloat through development intervention must be addressed in a comprehensive way.

“Growth is down, income and employment are seriously impacted and debt service is particularly challenged, because we are speaking of the capacity of governments to continue supporting their populations in the midst of crisis.”

The Conference featured presentations on scenarios and strategies for cooperation in the region post-COVID-19 from the cooperation agencies of Mexico, Chile, Peru, United Arab Emirates, European Union, the Republic of Korea, Alba Bank and the Ibero-American Programme for the Strengthening of South-South Cooperation. All of these agencies concluded that, coordinated cooperation and multilateralism should be at the centre of any recovery and response plan. Once again “we are all in this together” was echoed by all.

The fourth ACS International Cooperation Conference was, for the first time, held virtually. The Conference is an opportunity for the ACS to gather all major actors in global cooperation to further develop and discuss solutions to regional challenges. The event also offers an occasion to foster and strengthen existing relations and develop new alliances with donor agencies.

The Association of Caribbean States is an organisation that works towards sustainable development of the Greater Caribbean. The Organisation’s work is focused on: cooperation, disaster risk reduction; sustainable tourism; trade, transport & external economic relations; the protection of the Caribbean Sea, education and culture.