The ACS Brings Together Leaders and Experts at COP16 on best practices for addressing Coastal Erosion in the Greater Caribbean



In the margins of the COP 16 hosted by Colombia, which also holds the chairmanship of of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the ACS Secretariat convened a dynamic exchange on the topic “Preserving the Biodiversity of the Greater Caribbean: United Against Coastal Erosion. The event brought together state and civil society leaders and experts from across the region to discuss efforts and initiatives to conserve biodiversity and mitigate coastal erosion in the Greater Caribbean, examining country case studies that have enjoyed success. The event took place on October 28, 2024, in Cali, Colombia with the support of CAF Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The event opened with remarks from Foreign Minister Luis Gilberto Murillo Urrutia. In his speech, Minister Murillo emphasized that climate change poses a direct threat to the Caribbean, and that mitigation efforts must focus on sustainable solutions that protect ecosystems and promote community well-being.

ACS Secretary General Rodolfo Sabonge underscored the importance of prioritizing the protection of nature and oceans, noting that to address this priority, governments, communities, civil society, and multilateral organizations must work together. He emphasized the need to restore ecosystem balance including by safeguarding Indigenous knowledge and integrating their experience into environmental preservation projects.

During the event, the ACS signed a Declaration of Interest with the WorldView International Foundation (WIF), undertaking further dialogue on how the parties might help Greater Caribbean countries to preserve mangroves. WIF CEO Kim Noguera Gabrielli expressed the Foundation’s commitment to strengthening regional cooperation in conservation, capacity building and the restoration of coastal and marine ecosystems.

The panel also addressed coastal erosion management, a topic presented by Dr. José Luis Juanes Martí, Technical Coordinator of the first phase of the ACS flagship Sandy Shorelines project. This project, executed by the ACS in partnership with the Korean Institute of Ocean Science and Technology (KIOST) and funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), resulted in

the publication of a Guide for the Protection and Conservation of Beaches in the Greater Caribbean. Dr. Juanes encouraged the countries in the region to join the next iteration of this project and similar initiatives to preserve their beaches.

Case studies on mangrove restoration were presented by speakers representing indigenous communities in Colombia and Mexico whilst the importance of preserving the native languages of Afro-descendant communities as a means of capturing and on passing traditional knowledge critical to the preservation of biodiversity was emphasized. Carlos Robinson Quiró, Indigenous Governor of the Eperaara Siapidaara community; Richard Francis Beltrán, Raizal leader from San Andrés and Providencia; and Dali Ángel Pérez, a Zapotec Indigenous leader from Oaxaca, Mexico, shared their communities' appreciation of the environment as fundamental to their cultural identity and sustainable economies, underscoring the historical role of communities like theirs as stewards of these ecosystems. In this regard the role of mangroves in protecting the flora, fauna, beaches, coastal ways of life and livelihoods was vividly illustrated.

The event concluded with remarks from Jesús Guerra Bell, representing the Executive Board of the ACS Caribbean Sea Commission, who called for strengthened collaboration and action to enhance coastal resilience and biodiversity in the Greater Caribbean. He highlighted that the restoration of these ecosystems brings both environmental and economic benefits to local communities.