



# Advancing regional integration and cooperation

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It is indeed a pleasure to be able to celebrate on this occasion, the publication of the 10th Yearbook of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), providing a space in which to highlight and record the most significant advancements made in the thematic work areas such as: Sustainable Tourism, Trade, Transport and Disaster Risk Reduction, as well as the Preservation of the Resources and Marine Biodiversity of the Caribbean Sea – our common patrimony, towards fulfilling the mandates established by the Ministerial Council comprising Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Association.

It is also a perfect opportunity to convey thanks to the Member Countries, Associate Members, Observer Countries, Founding Organisations and other regional and extra-regional entities that have been participating in this effort to promote the integration of the Greater Caribbean in the areas mentioned, by way of cooperation and the joint action of institutional and personal synergies.

Since assuming the leadership of the ACS Secretariat on 3rd March 2008, thanks to the support received from the Member Countries of the Central American group including Belize, the Dominican Republic and Panama as Members of the Central American Integration System (SICA), the commitment was adopted to heighten the ACS's impact in the Region.

In this regard, it should be emphasised that there is institutional approval of the Caribbean Sea Commission and the adoption of UNGA Resolution (63-214) "Towards the Sustainable Development of the Caribbean Sea for Present and Future Generations" in the United Nations General Assembly; whose content is geared towards declaring the Caribbean Sea a Special Area in the Context of Sustainable Development, an aspiration that is valued by the Members of the ACS. This process enjoyed significant support from the Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, as the highest representative of the United Nations System. Barbados

in its capacity as Chairman of the Committee and Guatemala as Vice-President both have contributed with their diplomatic political leadership, institutional support and as host of meetings of the Commission.

In order to strengthen the process for rendering the institutionality of the Caribbean Sea Commission functional, financial support has been received from Observer Countries such as Finland, Turkey and South Korea. Moreover, scientific institutions, academies, foundations, NGOs, and specialised regional bodies that are developing projects and programmes on marine issues of international renown, have endorsed the work and role of the Caribbean Sea Commission. For the very first time, this issue that is fundamental for the ACS and which is a link among Member Countries, has obtained a clear perspective toward focusing the development of its work agenda on managing the preservation and protection of the resources and marine biodiversity of the Caribbean Sea. To do so, they have drawn on the experience of and lessons learnt by other regions in the world, such as the Baltic Sea Commission and the Black Sea Commission, thanks to the efforts and support of the Government of Finland.

In addition, the thematic area of Sustainable Tourism has made significant advances with the creation of the Association of Caribbean Cruise Ship Destinations of the Greater Caribbean; an industry that has been growing throughout the length and breadth of the region.

The Ministers of Tourism of the ACS have supported this process from its II Ministerial Meeting held in Colombia. Turkey has provided financial resources; and Member States such as Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Dominican Republic, St Kitts & Nevis, St Lucia and Cuba, with the leadership of Nicaragua have made progress in this discussion with the participation of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) and the Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat, (SITCA- for its initials in Spanish). This process is expected to conclude soon with the approval of the Association of Cruise Ship Destinations of the Greater Caribbean.



In the area of Disaster Risk Reduction, the ACS adopted the Saint Marc Plan, which has received international recognition as the road map for developing this work agenda. Regional organisations have acknowledged the value of the ACS as a forum for discussion and exchanges of best practices and lessons learnt in order to improve regional and national response capabilities for disaster risk reduction. The Dominican Republic hosted the most important meeting since the adoption of the Saint Marc Plan, where they discussed the post earthquake situation in Haiti, the lessons learned in disaster prevention, and new initiatives in this area.

In the framework of the Saint Marc Plan, emphasis must be placed on the contribution made by Finland to the project entitled “Strengthening Hydrometeorological Operations and Services in the SIDS of the Caribbean (SHOCS)”, which made proposals for 16 countries including: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. This project was introduced to improve the early warning mechanisms of these aforementioned countries.

As regards the Trade and Investment agenda, the IX and X Business Forums took place in Aruba and Haiti respectively. The latter took place before the earthquake of January 2010, and it was successfully organised by the government and the private sector of Haiti with the support of the ACS. Furthermore, it is important to mention the contribution of the ACS in conducting the Business Conference “Connecting the Caribbean and Central America: Exploring and Seizing New Opportunities”, in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Trinidad and Tobago, which was held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago in 2010. This activity had a significant impact on the rapprochement of the Central American countries with CARICOM, and particularly at this stage with Trinidad and Tobago. In this respect, it provided an important impetus to promote a higher level of trade and investment in the context of the possible negotiation of a free trade agreement between both regions.

Regarding the agenda of Maritime and Air Transport, progress has been made in developing the Map of Maritime Routes of the Greater Caribbean, a software platform utility for users of maritime transport within and outside the region. South Korea and Turkey have supported this initiative under the leadership of Cuba and the Central American Commission on Maritime

Transportation. In the field of air transport, it is important to mention the entry into force of the “Air Transport Agreement between Member States and Associate Members of the Association of Caribbean States”.

Fluid communication and coordination with the Secretariats of the Central American Integration System (SICA) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), have proved to be a crucial factor in the ACS’s work dynamic. This has translated into increased levels of cooperation and complementarity with the specialised entities of those organisations in matters associated with the Caribbean Sea, Sustainable Tourism, Disaster Risk Reduction, Trade and Transport.

As part of this dynamic, one should emphasize the importance of the Association agreements signed by the European Union with Central America and with CARIFORUM respectively. These agreements will create the conditions for bringing together both regions, and for seeing themselves as potential partners within the framework of developing an agenda of common interest.

In this context, it is necessary to highlight the presence of France through its Overseas Territories, particularly Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Greater Caribbean region, which are part of the Euro Zone. The above-mentioned islands are located in a strategic position in the Eastern Caribbean, which could provide windows of opportunity for connectivity between Central America and the Caribbean in terms of their trade relations, economic development and cooperation with the European Union.

It is also fitting to draw reference to the input of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), an entity that has never faltered in its support for the ACS on matters relating to the Caribbean Sea, Disaster Risk Reduction and the institutional strengthening of the ACS. Similarly, recognition must be given to the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA), for being a founding entity of the ACS, with which there has been fluid communication. These cooperative relations among regional organisations are contributing to the consolidation of the process to create the Latin American and Caribbean Community that was launched in Brazil in Salvador de Bahía.

Finally, on behalf of the ACS, thanks to all those who collaborated towards making this edition a reality, to the authors of the articles published, special recognition must go to the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Her Excellency Kamla Persad-Bissessar and to all the entities that provided sponsorship for this publication. ■

Scientific institutions, academies, foundations, NGOs, and specialised regional bodies have endorsed the work and role of the Caribbean Sea Commission