



Growing relations and common interests

Alexander Stubb,
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We look forward to strengthening the political dialogue between Finland and the Caribbean States in different international fora

I take pleasure in addressing the peoples of the Member Countries of the Association of Caribbean States. Finland is a Nordic country with 5.3 million inhabitants and a Member State of the European Union. We entertain extensive relations with the nations of the Caribbean and Finland is an ACS Observer Country.

Although we are geographically far away from the Caribbean, such global challenges as the climate change are issues of common interest and call for a joint response.

Finland is not rich in natural resources except for forests, but we are happy to be the home of many innovations including high-standard education from primary school to university level, state-of-the-art industries and a knowledge-based society.

The government and the private sector invest more than three per cent of the country's GNP in research and development which has speeded up the development of innovative new technologies. Also, in the Caribbean, people are connected by Finnish cellular phones and many tourists sail the sea on cruisers made in Finland.

With regard to foreign policy, Finland maintains good relations with all countries and is not a member of any military alliance. Finland has contributed to peace-building since 1956, participating in numerous international peacekeeping operations and crisis management missions.

Finland is an active member of the United Nations and a staunch supporter of multilateralism. As a small country, Finland has a vital interest in promoting a well-functioning system of collective security based on international law that guides and binds all member states, big and small alike.

Currently, Finland is proud to stand as a candidate for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council for the period of 2013-14. My government would very much welcome the support of our Caribbean friends for our candidacy. We look forward to strengthening the

political dialogue between Finland and the Caribbean States in different international fora such as the UN, the WTO and others.

I am convinced that peace can be reinforced by helping poor people through efficient development cooperation. In the Americas, we are bilaterally supporting regional programmes in Central America and the Andean Community. A substantial part of the Finnish contributions to the region is channelled multilaterally via UN programmes and through the European Union.

In my mind, there are several promising areas where sharing the Finnish experience could be valuable in the Caribbean. For example: Introducing the ombudsman institution; Upgrading forestry programmes; Promoting renewable and alternative sources of energy; Comparing best practices in education; and enhancing meteorological know-how and disaster preparedness capacity.

We especially understand the concern of the states of the region for the unique marine environment of the Caribbean Sea.

I recall with pleasure my meeting with Ambassador Luis Fernando Andrade Falla, ACS Secretary General, in Finland in January 2009. We exchanged views and ideas on how the relations between Finland and the Caribbean could be intensified.

I am happy to note that the cooperation on marine research, protection, transport and infrastructure on a bilateral and regional level was concretely launched in an international expert meeting on the Caribbean Sea Commission, organised by the ACS with the support of the Baltic Sea Commission HELCOM and sponsored by Finland, in Barbados on 7th-9th July 2010.

In trade, we should continue to discuss and elaborate possible business opportunities. It is important not only to maximise actual trade patterns but to explore all potential for its diversification. I am confident that Finland and the Caribbean can have an interesting and a mutually beneficial future. ■