



## Panama: a full partner in the Greater Caribbean

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Panama's commitment to the Association of Caribbean States has been deep and sincere since its inception. This commitment has been validated with concrete facts: our country hosted the IV Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2005; during 2006 we presided over the Special Committee for Trade Development and External Economic Relations, and in 2007 we assumed the presidency of the Ministerial Council.

Our presidency coincided with the declared "Year of the Implementation of the Legal Instruments of the ACS". We are pleased that the Member States and Associate Members have made progress on this objective and that the legal documents negotiated in important areas of common interest – such as tourism, natural disasters and air transport – may soon be implemented. I would like to express that Panama has carried out the ratification of every single one of the legal instruments.

The work of the ACS has multiplied in recent years due to the New Vision adopted in the Panama Declaration. This document not only circumscribes the areas of trade, tourism, transport and natural disasters, but it also has a great political objective, expressed in the work of the Caribbean Sea Commission, which achieved, for the first time, recognition by the international community of the Greater Caribbean as a Special Area of Sustainable Development.

Added to this is the work carried out by the Special Committees. In the Special Committee for Trade Development and External Economic Relations, for example, we have reintroduced the Greater Caribbean Rum Dialogue, with the purpose of establishing international recognition of this key regional product, as well as undertaking common efforts to attain a larger share of the world market. Also, we are making progress towards a common agreement to protect investments.

It is also pertinent to mention the success of the VIII Business Summit of the Greater Caribbean and the Meeting of Trade Promotion Organisations, both of which were held in Panama in 2007.

For its part, the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism has achieved considerable progress in its objectives such as the creation of a Centre for the Promotion of the Languages and Cultures of the Greater Caribbean, and the

elaboration of pilot plans for the development of sustainable tourism in various parts of the Caribbean.

Meanwhile, the Special Committee on Transport is continuing the construction of an information network regarding intra-regional maritime activities, which will enable accurate access to the shipping services available in the Greater Caribbean, an important resource for any integration effort.

With regards to the Special Committee on Natural Disasters, I would like to highlight the High-Level meeting in Haiti. Haiti's hosting of this meeting pleases us greatly, since besides the importance of the subject, it indicates that Haiti is being re-integrated into the international community.

All this activity is being undertaken with great human effort and in spite of severe economic limitations. This reality forces us to appeal for the efficient use of resources and for the creativity to find new financial sources. However, we must continue reflecting on the necessity to obtain additional resources for the ACS, as the Budget and Administration Committee has been doing, not forgetting the procedures undertaken by the Board of the Special Fund in order to align and harmonise the cooperation it currently receives, and in order to make the ACS a cooperation partner with other agents who until now have not had the necessary jurisprudence to support the programmes and projects of our interest.

We cannot fail to applaud the cultural and educational initiatives of the ACS, such as the extraordinary publication of the Book of Nobel Prizes of the Greater Caribbean; a work for the benefit of future generations that exemplifies the values that give consistency and bring recognition to the region.

This summary of developments in the Greater Caribbean leads me to acknowledge gratefully the support we have received from the Member States, the Associate Members, and especially the people and government of Trinidad and Tobago, who have demonstrated an unsurpassable disposition as a host country. We must also applaud the efforts of the authorities and officials of the ACS, in particular the Secretary General, Rubén Silié, who has left a clear path for the accomplishment of our objectives.

I urge the incoming authorities to carry forward our work so that with renewed spirits, we may continue improving this space of progress, wellbeing and hope that is our Greater Caribbean. ■