

Secretary General's message

By **ALFONSO MÚNERA CAVADÍA**

SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES



ALFONSO MÚNERA has long served in the field of diplomacy within the Greater Caribbean. A graduate of the University of Cartagena, Colombia, where he studied Law and Political Science, he went on to pursue a Master's at the University of Connecticut in the United States which he received in 1993. He completed his doctorate at the same institution in 1995, finishing his academic studies with a PhD in Latin American and United States History. Having served as Colombia's Ambassador to Jamaica from 1999-2003, and Special Advisor to the Caribbean from 2009-10, he was elected Secretary General of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) in 2012.

The creation of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) was the product of a group of Caribbean visionaries during the period 1980-1990. With an in-depth knowledge of the difficult and complex international circumstances existing at the time, they formed this dialogue space for co-operation among the countries of the Greater Caribbean. All governments belonging to this region enthusiastically welcomed this idea and decisively contributed to its establishment. On July 24, 1994, the ACS was born in Cartagena de Indias, comprising 25 Member States and 3 Associate Member States.

In the contemporary world context marked not only by a decentralisation of global political power, but also by severe crises in several European Union economies and by the strengthening of the integration and co-operation processes of Latin American and Caribbean nations, the ACS is today, more than ever before, a powerful tool that is unique in the current circumstances, in which its 25 Member States and 4 Associate Members can dialogue and co-operate freely and autonomously regarding issues that are critical for the Greater Caribbean, some of which must be addressed without delay, such as protecting ourselves against the extreme vulnerability of Caribbean islands and coasts, which are increasingly threatened by disasters brought about by natural phenomena, as well as safeguarding our Caribbean Sea, the *raison d'être* of our existence.

It is therefore necessary to strengthen what the ACS has succeeded in achieving thus far despite all the difficulties encountered. We have an unprecedented co-operation platform that is working extraordinarily well at the regional level, with respect to disaster prevention matters and which is perfectly suitable for addressing major macro projects in this area. In addition, we have made significant strides in coordinating efforts to develop common programmes in the field of sustainable tourism, sensible and strategic activity for all countries belonging to the Caribbean. The ACS is also the ideal space where all the actors in the region could feel comfortable to dialogue and formulate work policies and instruments

for the development of activities related to joint production, investment and trade. And I am certain that we will be able to make tremendous progress in co-operation programmes in the fields of education, culture, science and technology.

History has taught me that there are processes that mature more slowly than others and in the midst of even greater difficulties. It is by no means an easy task to dialogue and to share projects that are of common interest to nations which, for centuries, were separated from one another and which were in the habit of looking at one another strangely, divided by such strong barriers like the customs developed by a colonial past and separated by different languages.

I have also learnt from history that faith in ideals, patience to overcome difficulties and enthusiasm to move forward with optimism and a healthy dose of pragmatism destroy all obstacles, no matter how great they are. We need only arrive at our 5th Summit with enthusiasm and with the conviction that it is worthwhile to take a chance on this great idea that is the Association of Caribbean States.

Since this has not occurred in such a long time, the Heads of State and Government of the ACS have expressed their decision to convene to tackle the key issues of regional co-operation. The primary objective of the 5th Summit is to strengthen the ACS, based on the acknowledgement that this is the space that we have created to make co-operation in the Greater Caribbean region more effective and productive in strategic areas, for the advancement and general wellbeing of the countries that constitute it.

My deepest gratitude to President Michel Joseph Martelly and his entire government, for the enthusiasm and commitment with which they have organised this 5th Summit. Haiti is, and always will be, an extraordinary symbol of the struggle for freedom and human dignity for all peoples of the world. I feel that it is a great privilege that this significant Meeting of Heads of State and Government of the Greater Caribbean takes place in Haiti.

Many thanks also to all those who, with their daily efforts, have made the convening of this 5th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Greater Caribbean possible