

# Old neighbours, new friends

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Over the last thirty years, the governments of Haiti and the Dominican Republic have been determined to create a climate of sound relations, leaving behind the era of dictatorial authoritarianism, which led to historical events that sowed the seed of distance between our two peoples. The fact that both countries have embarked on the pathway of democracy has allowed them to appreciate the importance of having systems of relations that would facilitate exchange for the benefit of both peoples.

Following the severe earthquake of 2010, these relations have grown stronger, reaching a surprising level, since there was not only an increase in displays of solidarity and co-operation, but the Dominican Republic overtly began to promote solidarity with the Haitian people, which has intensified the creation of an environment of mutual trust. While this environment has been established among the government authorities of both countries, it has also been created among the various sectors of the civil society.

The efforts undertaken between the two governments since 2010 led to such a degree of mutual understanding that the two Ministries of Planning and Co-operation were able to share their respective strategic plans for development, with which, for the very first time, both governments were able to concretely identify fundamental areas of co-operation.

At the governmental level, in the framework of the efforts of the Bilateral Mixed Commission, several agreements were consolidated that seek to lay down rules for the most important areas of co-operation. I am referring to the agreements signed by President Leonel Fernández and President Michel Martelly, during the visit by the latter to the Dominican Republic on March 26, 2012, namely: a) a Memorandum of Understanding on Trade, Investment and Tourism; b) a Memorandum of Understanding on Border Transport; c) a Memorandum of Understanding on Security and Borders; d) a Technical Co-operation Agreement in the Area of Higher Education, Science and Technology; e) technical Co-operation Agreement in the Area of Social Programmes on conditional transfers; and f) an MOU between the Ministries of Planning of both countries.

On a different note, it is important to point out that although trade between the two countries has been on

the rise gradually over the last three decades, within the past three years, it has achieved figures never before imagined, transforming Haiti into the second trade partner of the Dominican Republic.

In addition to that, the earthquake opened up new channels for relations, with Dominican consulting and civil engineering companies occupying a considerable space in the areas of construction, housing and public works. Moreover, it is worthwhile to mention that the last three major hotels completed last year had an input from Dominican engineers or some consultation regarding their installation.

The Dominican Government has insisted on accompanying Haitians in promoting investment in Haiti by important Dominican or foreign investors set up in our country. Toward that end, visits to forge closer relations have been made, during which our investors have been able to dialogue with the Haitian leaders and important sectors of the Haitian business community.

It cannot be denied that problematic situations do arise on occasion among the various players involved in the scenario of these insular relations, but in no instance have there been intergovernmental disputes. They are problems generated among specific parties which, in view of the absence of an adequate institutional structure that could provide a rapid response to such situations, can give rise to frustrating situations where the governments are compelled to intervene. None of these disputes however, has resulted in hostility between the Governments and in each case they have managed to arrive at harmonious solutions.

None of this can be presented as an obstacle to deepening relations between the two countries, since the political will of the leaders of the island is evident and the predominant discourse is to continue working toward building institutional infrastructure that is viable and pertinent in order to steer the currents of rapprochement that presently exist.

The levels of mutual knowledge achieved in recent years by two countries that remained “indifferent neighbours” for more than two centuries, lead us to think that the prospect of developing these relations is promising, reinforced by the strong vocation of co-operation between the governments and the increasingly intense levels of contact being made between the respective civil societies. **F**