

**7th SUMMIT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)
REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF COLOMBIA,
Her Excellency MARÍA ÁNGELA HOLGUÍN CUELLAR**

Havana, June 4, 2016

Special greetings to the President of the State and Ministerial Councils of the Republic of Cuba, Raúl Castro Ruz and my sincerest and heartfelt thanks for your hospitality and for the steps taken to organise the 7th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Association of Caribbean States and for making this new meeting of the countries of the Greater Caribbean possible.

On behalf of President Juan Manuel Santos, I extend cordial greetings to the Heads of State and Government of the countries belonging to the Association of Caribbean States.

I would like to also take this opportunity to acknowledge the work done by Secretary Alfonso Múnera Cavadía who, since 2012, when he began his term as Secretary General, dedicated his efforts to the financial and institutional strengthening of the Association of Caribbean States and to its renewal, based on the objectives outlined in the Plan of Action of Pétiion Ville and who has had Colombia at his side at all times.

To Ambassador June Soomer of Saint Lucia, my congratulations on your recent election as Secretary General of the Association. You have Colombia's full support and commitment and we are delighted that you are the first woman to serve at the helm of the Association.

We also welcome Saint Martin, as a new Associate Member, as well as the new Observer States elected yesterday, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Uruguay, Kazakhstan and ALBA.

Mr. Chairman,

Thanks to the impetus of the last four years and the joint work of the Secretariat and the Presidents Pro Tempore, in addition to the valuable commitment of Member States, we agreed to considerably increase our contributions to the Association's

budget, and that has made it possible for efforts to be undertaken to improve the salary conditions of the staff, dynamize the agenda and broaden areas of cooperation toward issues of great interest and importance for the region, such as education, the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage of our Caribbean and natural disaster risk reduction, to name a few.

Another area in which we have spared no effort since 2010 is connectivity in the region. Today we can highlight as a major achievement, the establishment of the first direct air connection between Colombia and Barbados, a route that has been operating successfully since December 2, 2015. Colombia reiterates its interest in advancing toward strategies for air connectivity, which is essential for the mobilisation of human capital, the trade in goods and services and the growth and boost of tourist destinations in the Greater Caribbean.

We recognise that it is an area in which we must continue seeking out alternatives that would allow routes and connections within the Greater Caribbean to be established or increased and which would help to create synergies between the tourism sector and the sector for the transport of persons and goods in the sub-region.

With respect to international cooperation, Colombia is committed to diversifying the agenda with the Caribbean, with a view to contributing to the strengthening and integration of the Region.

From the very start of President Juan Manuel Santos' tenure, we have engaged in continuous actions in areas such as food security, trade, culture, research and education. This is evident in the Language Assistants Programme that we developed in Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, Suriname and Grenada and also in our participation in the International Network of Caribbean Researchers and in the Network of Carnivals.

We have also developed cooperation in security and the fight against international organised crime, especially the fight against the global drug problem. This is a challenge that is common to all countries of the region and one that we will overcome as long as we take action together.

We, the 25 Member States of the Association of Caribbean States share a common objective, specifically the increase in trade, as one of the means toward achieving greater economic development. Increased intraregional trade flows must play a pivotal role in this goal.

Thus, in order to strengthen economic and trade ties in the Greater Caribbean, Colombia has proposed that we explore together, in a working group, the possibility of moving forward with initiatives that would reduce obstacles to trade in the region, bearing in mind the different levels of development of the Members of the Association. Should this initiative be realised, we would not only witness sizeable growth in trade and investment, but we would also see those flows contributing significantly to the development of our economies.

The environmental agenda, climate change and the sustainable development goals are important to us all. Colombia appreciates the positive initiative of the Cuban Government to invite us to dialogue on a matter of such importance and relevance today. Our main challenge is to tackle climate change and maintain peace, which is an enormous responsibility with the generations that will succeed us.

With respect to sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted last September, which acknowledges that the eradication of poverty in all its manifestations and dimensions is the greatest challenge facing the world and is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. This is a challenge that affects all of our countries and for which we are charged with the responsibility for acting decisively.

The 2030 Agenda is a tool for strengthening the promotion of Development in the Greater Caribbean, taking into account that it includes key issues for our sub-region such as trade, transport and sustainable tourism, to name a few.

We the countries that constitute the Greater Caribbean are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. We must not delay the implementation of policies and programmes that would allow us to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the vulnerability of sectors and territories and in turn raise the adaptive capacity of our communities. Colombia is absolutely committed to this process.

The adoption of the Paris Agreement last December by 175 countries represents one of the greatest achievements of multilateralism since, for the very first time in history, a universal agreement was reached and with legally binding commitments for both developed and developing countries, thereby allowing the pooling of efforts toward resolving the challenges associated with climate change.

The Paris Agreement also confirms the commitment of industrialised countries, which are large emitters, to undertake efforts to quickly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote in all nations, a truly sustainable future for their citizens.

Mr. Chairman,

We have listened attentively to the intervention of President Nicolás Maduro. We will continue to insist that it is crucial that Venezuelans be the ones to find solutions to overcome their difficulties. We are convinced of the benefits of dialogue between the opposition and the Government of President Nicolás Maduro, as well as compliance with the procedures outlined in the Constitution, as the proper means toward the understanding that would allow the resolution of their problems and the restoration of economic, political and social stability in the sister Republic of Venezuela. We support former Presidents Zapatero, Fernández and Torrijos.

In closing, I wish to take this opportunity to convey special thanks to President Raúl Castro and the Cuban Government for their hospitality and for their decisive commitment and valuable support for peace in Colombia. I also thank the Venezuelan Government for its support during this process.

I want to also express my gratitude for the support received from the countries of the region for the advancement of this process that will bring an end to the only armed conflict in this hemisphere.

We know that you are at our side on this journey and we are certain that the Association of Caribbean States is united to tackle, among other challenges, those related to peace in the Region.