

Working Together for a Sustainable Caribbean



Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, May 31st, 2016 - In just five days, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) will host its historical VII Summit of Heads of State and/or Government which will take place on June 4, Havana, Cuba. The year 1996 was the first time that the Government of the Republic of Cuba hosted the high level 2nd Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council in its country. This Summit marks twenty years since Cuba hosted an ACS meeting and the Association is pleased as Cuba is once again welcoming its regional counterparts to its shores.

Secretary General Alfonso Múnera revealed that the Association is expecting a great turn out by Heads of State and Ministries of Foreign Affairs, having expressed that more than 17 Heads of States have already confirmed their attendance.

He further elaborated that this Summit is of particular significance since the Association aims to continue the dialogue and build upon the previous commitment made in the Declaration of Pétion-Ville for revitalization and consolidation through regional cooperation, especially as it pertains to pressing issues in the Greater Caribbean Region. It is expected that the Plan of Action and Declaration of Havana will be approved at the Summit.

The main focus of this Summit is to be able to strengthen the unity of the Greater Caribbean Region with the optimism that this Meeting will guide the Association in building a dialogue and strategies to collectively combat the negative impacts of climate change, in addition to developing programmes in the focal areas of Trade, Transport, Disaster Risk Reduction and Sustainable Tourism. Some of the issues which will be of crucial importance on the agenda are Climate Change, Coastal Erosion, Eradication of Sargassum Seaweed and the Conservation and Preservation of the Caribbean Sea.

Climate Change is one of the most serious problems that humanity has to face today. It is not simply an ecological predicament but also an economical one, as countries are burdened with having to spend excessively to treat with the issues at hand, like that of Mexico, Barbados and Tobago in relation to the Sargassum Seaweed epidemic which has directly and greatly affected their economies. In addition to and more prevalent than the Sargassum Seaweed dilemma is the growing intensity and number of Natural Disasters in the Region where climate change is the main cause of

two extremes: drought and flooding.

The ACS is currently engaging in Special Projects and Consultations that are in keeping with the priority areas of the organisation to conserve and preserve our natural heritage, the Caribbean Sea and even more specifically the coral reefs. These projects will strengthen the Region's capacity to address climate change collectively.

The projected cost for the start of such projects is US 6 million dollars, thus it is of key significance that the Greater Caribbean Region work in unison, as there is a need to persuade the rest of the world (especially the middle-income and developed countries) that the Greater Caribbean Region is one of the most fragile regions in the world and is one of the victims of climate change and if nothing is done, theoretically, the possibility exists that some countries in the Caribbean Region can disappear within the next fifty to one hundred years due to rising sea levels.

It is therefore critical that other countries and regions internationally join with the Greater Caribbean to tackle these issues. The region also needs resources from such countries and must work actively toward this.

Another major issue that will be addressed in order to make the Greater Caribbean Region a contender amongst the other countries, from a tourism standpoint is that of air and maritime connectivity and how to improve such between islands and countries, which will also boost inter-regional tourism.

It is of paramount prominence that the Greater Caribbean Region and the rest of the world understand the need to work Together for a Sustainable Caribbean, which mirrors the sentiment of the theme of this year's historical Summit.