

## Association of Caribbean States Installs New Secretary General



### MEDIA RELEASE

#### ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES INSTALLS NEW SECRETARY GENERAL

New SG to promote integrated solutions to regional challenges

Port-of-Spain

Effective November 1, Rodolfo Sabonge will take office as the seventh Secretary General of the Association of Caribbean States. In a handover ceremony today at the Secretariat in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, outgoing SG Dr. June Soomer passed the baton to Mr. Sabonge, who was elected Secretary General from among the non-aligned group of countries (Cuba, Dominican Republic & Panama) in the ACS Membership.

A Panamanian, Mr. Sabonge is an engineer by profession and has 45 years of experience in the areas of international trade, transport, maritime and logistic development. He was the General Manager of the Panama Railroad; Plant Engineer, responsible for the maintenance of the Locks of the Panama Canal; and led the planning for the transfer of the Panama Canal from the United States to the Republic of Panama. He said that the opportunity is a privilege that he appreciates, coming from a special region.

“Our culture is possibly the most rich and diverse in this world. In our Caribbean Sea, indigenous people, descendants of Africa, Europe and Asia met and created this mixture that has resulted in this great identity. Our rich DNA comes from all corners of the earth... In particular, COVID has affected tourism in all Caribbean countries, trade, supply chains, logistics, air, sea and land transport. This is

in addition to the impacts that climate change was having at the international level. Maybe, never before has the imperative need for us to work together been so evident. We need to work together in solidarity to find collaborative and integrated solutions to our challenges.”

“This assignment comes at a moment, and in circumstances which we never thought we would encounter as a human race. From there, we have to confront the challenges, which I never thought the appointment would bring. But I think that my personal and professional experiences, in my areas of expertise will be much more valuable for the Association, Members and Associates.”

Outgoing Secretary General Dr. June Soomer, who was the first woman to serve as SG said, “We speak to each other in different languages but hopefully we cooperate around issues that are very similar to us, to ensure that it is for the benefit of the peoples of the Greater Caribbean. He will be the defender of our great constitution and Convention established in 1994, and as a historian, I would like to tell him that the Convention was designed so that there would be decolonisation of this region and that there would be steps to ensure that we speak together as one voice.”

SG Soomer highlighted the importance of consultation, cooperation and concerted action in seeking the sustainable development of the Greater Caribbean. “As the premiere coordinating mechanism in the region, this organisation is continuing to take its place at the top of all observer bodies in the Greater Caribbean.”

Over the last four years, SG Soomer, a born Saint Lucian and representative of the CARICOM region, led the ACS through a period of restructuring, revitalisation and consolidation, with a focus on protection of the Caribbean Sea, cooperation, resource mobilisation, youth and culture. The Ministerial Council extended the term of SG Soomer for an additional three months given the uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Association of Caribbean States is an organisation that works towards sustainable development of the Greater Caribbean. The Organisation’s work is focused on: cooperation; disaster risk reduction; climate change; the protection of the Caribbean Sea; sustainable tourism; trade, transport & external economic relations; education and culture. The ACS, established in 1994, has 25 Members, 11 Associate Members, seven Founding Observers, 28 Observer Countries and several Social Actors.