

OPENING REMARKS FROM THE CARICOM SECRETARIAT

Fay Housty, Director of Foreign Policy and External Relations

Honourable Ken Valley, Ministry of Trade and Industry of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Norman Girvan Secretary General of the Association of Caribbean States, Director General of ECLAC, Mr. Daniel Blanchard, H.E. Carlos Echeverria, Chairman of the ACS Special Committee on Trade Development, representative of Members States, President of the CDB, Dr. Compton Bourne, Members of the Media, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to thank the ACS for the invitation to participate in this Seminar-Workshop.

I would also like to apologize for the Secretary General's absence who had prior commitments.

As CARICOM celebrates its 30th birthday it is a time for reflection and for setting new goals. One of the achievements of which we are proud is the role, which CARICOM Member States played in the conception and birth of the ACS. Like good parents, we recognize that in these formative years of the Association we have an important role to play in nurturing and supporting the ACS, to make it mature to effective arrangement for consultation, cooperation and concerted action in trade, transportation, sustainable development among the countries of the Caribbean Basin.

This workshop today is a perfect example of the contribution, which the ACS can make in forging alliances in the field of trade. It is taking place against a backdrop of an uncertain global economic climate where the negative impacts have already begun to be felt in some economies. It is also taking place at a time when all the countries in the Greater Caribbean are actively involved in international trade negotiations in the case of CARICOM member States in WTO, FTAA, ACP, EU, and Regional bilateral and in deepening the integration process. The aim of these negotiations is ultimately to create international trade rules and an environment, which will foster the social and economic upliftment of the people of our region. However, in order to achieve these objectives we must ensure that our industries can compete in an industrial international environment. In this context the agenda item on competitiveness will be of interest. We also have to ensure that there is trade liberalization with equity. We have to continually remind our trading partners that we are not operating on a level playing field and that there is need for special and different treatment to accommodate our size and levels of development.

Mr. Chairman, we are now in the midst of the hurricane season in our Basin – from now until November our people will have to be alert and prepare ourselves for the whirlwinds and the devastation that hurricane winds and rain can bring. We have been warned that this year will be an unusually severe season. We hope and pray that we will be spared.

Similarly between now and November our Member States will be involved in a whirlwind of preparations for the WTO Trade Ministerial meeting in September and the FTAA Ministerial in November in Miami, both venues are vulnerable to storms of both man and nature. We cannot control the latter but we can try to be prepared to avert the problems of the former.

At this stage the prospects for a positive outcome for our countries in the Greater Caribbean at both of these fora do not seem very bright. Progress in the implementation of the Doha “Development” agenda has been slow with missed deadlines and no action on the special and differential treatment for developing countries nor on the work programmes for smaller economies. As the larger developed countries seek to resolve their difference prior to Cancun, there are no assurances that the interests of our small developing countries will be safeguarded. In Cancun we cannot afford to take on new commitments such as starting negotiations on the Singapore issues, even before the outstanding issues on the development agenda have been resolved. The presentation in the workshop on the Doha Agenda and implications for SDT, will provide a useful starting point for the debate.

Stocktaking in the FTAA reveals that there may be need for a more pragmatic approach to meeting the objective of the 2005 deadline. Debate has already begun on the need to review the scope and content of the FTAA. The next meeting of the FTAA in Trinidad and Tobago in September will provide another opportunity for the examination of the scope of the FTAA.

Despite many declarations there is still little tangible evidence of accommodation in the FTAA for the concerns of countries of different size and levels of development. I look forward to the session on the “Future of SDT in the FTAA-Possible mechanisms and specific measures for implementations”, to advance ideas on this subject. The focus of discussion in the workshop in the next days on the special and differential treatment is therefore timely. Representatives will not only share ideas but also seek to build the alliances, which should assist in promoting the ideas in the respective fora. We are particularly pleased to note that one of the items in the agenda is the Regional Co-operation Fund. It seems that after many unsuccessful attempts to promote this idea, the time is now ripe. Many countries that formally opposed the idea in the FTAA have now agreed that the proposal should be studied. Our discussions can make a positive contribution towards taking this proposal from a concept to reality.

Mr. Chairman, we look forward to a fruitful outcome of our deliberations.