

## A New Chair of Ministerial Council & New Secretary General & New Associate Member for ACS



### MEDIA RELEASE

#### A NEW CHAIR OF MINISTERIAL COUNCIL & NEW SECRETARY GENERAL & NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBER FOR THE ACS

19/06/2020

Port-of-Spain

The Dominican Republic has assumed the position of Chair of the Ministerial Council of the Association of Caribbean States. A virtual handshake exchanged between the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados marked the handover ceremony. At the meeting, the ACS Membership also named and ratified Panamanian engineer Rodolfo Sabonge as the incoming Secretary General of the 25-year-old Association.

Secretary General Sabonge will take office when SG Soomer demits office. While her term ends on July 31, 2020, the Ministerial Council decided on an extension of an initial period of three months, in view of the uncertainties that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused.

At the Meeting, Membership welcomed the island territory Montserrat as the 11th Associate Member of the ACS. Other matters included the adoption of its Work Programme of the 2019-2021 Action Plan, draft work programmes for engagement with Founding Observer Organisations and negotiation with the Observer States of Serbia, Italy and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Incumbent Chair Dr. Jerome X. Walcott expressed his thanks to incumbent Secretary General saying, "From the outset, Dr. Soomer, it was clear that you had a full understanding of your role and what was expected and had a clear vision for the ACS. CARICOM is indeed extremely proud of you and you will leave an indelible mark on the ACS that will redound to the benefit of all Members."

In response, Dr. Soomer quoted one of her favourite poets Jose Martí to describe her tenure, "But when women are moved and lend help, when women, who are by nature calm and controlled, give encouragement and applause, when virtuous and knowledgeable women grace the endeavour with their sweet love, then it is invincible."

Representative of the new Chair, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Dominican Republic, Hugo Rivera Fernandez thanked Barbados for its stewardship, “We wish to thank all of the countries for their support and allowing us to assume the chairmanship of the Association. We will do everything we can to ensure the well-being of the peoples of the Caribbean. We will work with you hand in hand, with our Caribbean nations, to ensure the development of our people will be possible in this era of the current pandemic. Together we are stronger.”

The rest of the Executive Board of the Ministerial Council comprises Guatemala, Barbados as Vice Chairs and Mexico as Rapporteur. Established in 1994, the Association of Caribbean States is an organisation for consultation, cooperation and concerted action in the Greater Caribbean. The ACS coordinates the mandates of its 25 Member States and 10 Associate Members. Its work is focused on, but not limited to disaster risk reduction; sustainable tourism, trade, transport and the protection and preservation of the Caribbean Sea.