

Cartagena Hosts the Commemorative Colloquium for the 30th Anniversary of the ACS



The University of Cartagena, in collaboration with the International Institute of Caribbean Studies, the Port Society of Cartagena, and the Spanish Cooperation Agency, organized the Colloquium titled "30 Years of the Association of Caribbean States" in Colombia. The colloquium took place at the Spanish Cooperation Center located in Cartagena on October 10 and 11, 2024.

Dr. Alfonso Múnera, former Secretary General of the ACS, inaugurated the event, highlighting the University's long tradition as a hub for dialogue and reflection on Caribbean matters, a commitment embodied in the creation of the International Institute of Caribbean Studies. He expressed his gratitude for the presence of distinguished guests, including the current Secretary General of the ACS, Rodolfo Sabonge, the Ambassador Margarita Manjares, Director of Regional Mechanisms at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responsible for engaging with regional organizations, and Ms. Elizabeth Salomon, Director for Regional Relations at CARICOM, underscoring the importance of CARICOM's participation. Dr. Múnera anticipated a successful event with insights from Mr. Sergio Díaz Granados and Mr. Bruce McMaster, along with panels addressing crucial topics such as maritime connectivity and climate change.

During the colloquium's inaugural ceremony, ACS Secretary General Rodolfo Sabonge emphasized the historical significance of returning to Cartagena, the city where the ACS Founding Convention was signed in 1994. "This colloquium is a milestone in the history of the ACS, an opportunity to reflect on past achievements and future challenges," stated the Secretary General, noting that the region faces increasingly complex challenges that require effective collaboration.

Secretary General Sabonge highlighted the need to carry out a strategic planning exercise to guide the region towards a more resilient and cohesive future. This process would align efforts in key areas such as physical and digital connectivity, sustainable development, and economic integration, effectively addressing the shared challenges of the member states.

The event brought together experts and regional leaders to discuss key topics for the integration and development of the Greater Caribbean. Dr. Sergio Díaz-Granados, Executive President of CAF –

Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean, emphasized the role of development banks in promoting economic integration, while Dr. Bruce Mac Master, President of the National Business Association of Colombia, explained the strategic importance of the Caribbean in the global economy. Additionally, Dr. Jorge Acevedo, President of J.A. Group (Mexico), explored the opportunities nearshoring offers to strengthen regional integration and capitalize on proximity to important markets. Dr. Ricardo Sánchez, Co-Director of the Kühne Chair of Logistics at the Faculty of Management at the University of the Andes (Colombia) and Director of the Caribbean Research Institute, addressed the need to improve maritime connectivity, which is essential for economic growth and cooperation.

INVEMAR Colombia was represented by Dr. Constanza Ricaurte, who spoke about the impact of climate change on the region and the solutions to mitigate its effects, particularly in addressing coastal erosion. Dr. Germán Rivillas, Researcher at the University of the North (Colombia), presented nature-based solutions to protect coasts from rising sea levels, along with green and blue infrastructure initiatives, particularly in the Colombian Caribbean. Additionally, Dr. Pedro Suárez, representing the Ministry of Transport of Cuba, stressed the importance of strengthening maritime routes and accessibility, highlighting the strategic role of ports for connectivity and resilience against climate challenges.

The "30 Years of the Association of Caribbean States" colloquium concluded with a call to action, emphasizing the need for a clear approach to address the region's challenges. The speakers agreed on the importance of strengthening regional cooperation as a foundation for the development of the Greater Caribbean, in a context of growing vulnerability to climate change and the need to improve regional transport and connectivity.

The collaboration between academic institutions, regional organizations, and international partners was reaffirmed as essential to building a more resilient, connected, and prosperous Caribbean. The event underscored the commitment to greater regional cohesion, recalling the historical relevance of Cartagena as the birthplace of the ACS and its role as a bridge to the future of the region.