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In celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), “ACS 20/20: Present and Future”, Mérida welcomed and played host to various authorities from Member and Associate Member States, Observers and Founding Organisations of the Association, when they converged for the VI Summit of Heads of State and/ or Government of the Association of Caribbean States on 30th of April, 2014.

The Summit gathered Presidents and Prime Ministers from the following Member Countries: His Excellency Enrique Peña Nieto, President of Mexico; The Honourable Perry Gladstone Christie, Prime Minister of The Bahamas; The Honourable Freundel Stuart, Prime Minister of Barbados; His Excellency Danilo Medina Sanchez, President of the Dominican Republic; The Honourable Keith Mitchell Prime Minister of Grenada; His Excellency Otto Pérez Molina, President of Guatemala; His Excellency Donald Ramotar, President of Guyana; His Excellency Michel Martelly, President of Haiti; His Excellency Juan Orlando Hernández, President of Honduras; The Honourable Portia Simpson, Prime Minister of Jamaica; The Honourable Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis and Luis Guillelmos Solís Rivera, President Elect of Costa Rica; the Honourable Ivar Asjes, Prime Minister of Curacao (Associate Member) and the Honourable Sarah Wescot-Williams, Prime Minister of Sint Maarten (Associate Member).

During the opening ceremony, presided over by the President of Mexico, His Excellency Enrique Peña Nieto stated that, “the Caribbean Sea is not a border that divides us, but on the contrary, it is without question, a bridge of unity among the countries that share the Caribbean region.” He further indicated that all participating Members can agree that the quest for unity and increased

communication and cooperation within the Caribbean and Latin America, which led to the formation of the Association of Caribbean States in 1994, and with the Association now celebrating its 20th Anniversary in 2014, has been fulfilled.

President Nieto further acknowledged the immense contribution made to the Association by the now deceased Dr. Norman Girvan, 2nd Secretary General of the ACS between the years 2000-2004. Additionally, the Mexican President recognized the recent adhesion of the new Associate Members of the ACS: Curaçao, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Sint Maarten.

The Mexican President then presented four projects, sponsored by the Mexican Government. He emphasized that these cooperation projects will be the most important tool to address common challenges and achieve the development of this region. These projects are as follows:

- United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management -

This project seeks to promote the development of Spatial Data Infrastructure in eleven countries in the Caribbean, to strengthen the generation, use and sharing of geospatial information. The project includes the necessary process equipment and provides for an investment of US\$4.5 million.

- Mesoamerican System of Territorial Information (SMIT) for the Caribbean - This project is aimed at strengthening institutions of risk management and civil defence by a homogeneous technological platform. That platform will allow for a more precise analysis of the threats, vulnerabilities and risks, which will result in safer planning for nations and people.

- Integration through Trade Facilitation/International Transit of Goods in the Greater Caribbean -

This project seeks to analyse obstacles and identify concrete actions to help improve the operating efficiency of customs in the Region, seeking to promote intraregional trade through the international transit of goods.

- Interconnectivity for Improved Trade facilitation and Short Distance Maritime Transport in the Greater Caribbean -

This project seeks to analyse obstacles and identify concrete actions to help improve the operating efficiency of ports in the region, seeking to promote intraregional trade through short distance maritime transport, with emphasis on support for small ports.

His Excellency Ambassador Alfonso Múnera, Secretary General of the ACS, in his opening speech

paid special tribute to two great personalities with whom he had the opportunity to share moments in his life: Dr. Norman Girvan, one of the greatest economists of the Caribbean, and Gabriel Garcia Marques, Nobel Prize Winner. The Secretary General also presented a report on the advances of the ACS in the areas of trade, sustainable tourism, transport, disaster risk reduction and the Caribbean Sea Commission. He further updated the gathering on the evaluation of the Plan of Action of Petion-Ville, which was approved during the V Summit of the ACS in Haiti. He then expressed gratitude to the Government of Mexico for hosting the Summit.

The President of Guatemala, in his capacity as Chair of the Ministerial Council of the ACS, expressed the importance of the ACS as a great tool for achieving the goals of all Members of the Greater Caribbean. He shared this sentiment with Trinidad and Tobago's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Winston Dookeran, who regarded the Association as leading the way for a system of Caribbean convergence which he views as "essential to cement a position of sustainability for all the economies in the region, large and small, in the global setting."

Another important contribution was delivered by Dr. Mario Molina, Nobel Prize Winner of Chemistry for Mexico, who urged Member Countries to be alert and assume actions against climate change. He stated that climate change is indeed "a reality despite being surrounded by myths." He further went on to explain that there is a consensus among up to 97% of experts who agree that the climate is changing and attributed some of these changes to societal activities. He declared that changes in climate will lead to future problems as evidenced by flooding, droughts and high-intensity rainfall.

The Declaration of Mérida was signed by 31 countries thereby bringing to an end the VI Summit of Heads of State and/ or Government of the Association of Caribbean States on the 30th of April, 2014. The Declaration reiterated "the permanence of the Association of Caribbean States as a special space for dialogue and co-operation in order to make strides in Latin America and Caribbean integration." This Declaration also highlighted the importance of the work being done in disaster risk management, transport and improved connectivity in the region, trade development and external economic relations as well as sustainable tourism.