**Comments of the Government of Jamaica on the Preliminary ACS Plan of Action 2016-2017 Rev. 3**

**IV Meeting of the Plan of Action Sub-Commission,**

**ACS Secretariat, 26th April 2016**

**Section 1- Sustainable Tourism**

**1.2** Training and Capacity Building

Jamaica supports the development of student exchange programmes to facilitate foreign language training, such as the Association’s partnership with the Centre for a Regional Approach to Languages (CIGAREL), and commends the initiative to build capacity in the tourism sector.

However, special consideration must be given to Member States who are poised to greatly benefit from these initiatives, but who may have difficulties accessing them, given the current visa restrictions and the ensuing financial implications for the candidates.

It is recommended that these factors be taken into consideration in organizing these programmes, so that proper measures can be put in place to facilitate Member States.

**Section 2- Trade, Development and Economic Relations**

**2.1** Gradual Reduction and Elimination of Barriers to Trade and Investment in the Greater Caribbean

With respect to paragraph 2.1 on the **Gradual Reduction and Elimination of Barriers to Trade and Investment in the Greater Caribbean**, it is noted that many of the proposals, such as the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding to govern the movement of business persons in the Greater Caribbean through the ACS- Business Travel Card Scheme (ACS-BTC), port development and reciprocal tariff preferences among ACS Member States, require serious policy considerations.  

2.1 Gradual Reduction and Elimination of Barriers to Trade and Investment in the Greater Caribbean

Trade has often fluctuated throughout the Greater Caribbean Region for a number of reasons, leaving some Member States to benefit more than others. It is therefore noted that this mechanism may benefit a number of countries in the region, by facilitating ease of movement for trade and other business purposes.

The difficulty, however, may arise in relation to the definition of ‘Business Persons’. In this regard, precision must be exercised when defining the parameters of the ‘Business Persons’ who will benefit from the scheme. That is to say, does the initiative include service providers and performers? Additionally, special care must be taken to ensure that the ACS Business Travel Card Scheme accords with general global principles of trade and trade facilitation that have been outlined in 1995 General Agreement on Trade and Services.

**2.1.2** Short-Distance Maritime Transport Project (SDMT)

With regards to the *creation of a database on import needs and demands and export offers, it should be noted that there is a need* to share information (at the very least, public information) regarding cargo flows, origin/destination, tariffs, etc.  The aim is to increase collaboration among regional ports, improve economies of scale and more competitive ports.

**2.2** Promotion of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the Greater Caribbean

Jamaica has no difficulty with the proposal for an annual MSME event  to deepen regional collaboration and to provide a forum for the exchange of policy perspectives in this critical area of economic development among ACS Member States. It should be noted that within the Caribbean sub-region, there is an existing proposal by the Small Business Association of Jamaica (SBAJ) in association with the Caribbean Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (CASME) to host a regional MSME Conference in Montego Bay, Jamaica during September 2016 under the theme “Collaboration for Caribbean Sustainability”.  The staging of the Conference is expected to be confirmed by the end of March 2016. We believe that this meeting would complement the wider annual MSME event which is being proposed in paragraph 2.2.

2.3 Promotion of the convergence and deepening of Trade within the ACS through new schemes

With regard to 2.4 on the **Promotion of the convergence and deepening of Trade within the ACS through new schemes** and 2.5 on **Strengthening of the Trade Capacity within the Region,** note is taken of the proposal of Mexico to merge these two paragraphs. However, there is a preference to keep 2.5 separate which deals with strengthening trade capacity in the Region**. In addition, we are of the view that** the proposal for a trade bulletin/monitor to track intra- ACS trade in paragraph 2.4  should be preserved in the POA.  Apart from ECLAC, which provides data on intra-regional trade (which sometimes omit the Caribbean), there is not much data available.

**Section 3 – Transport**

***TRANSPORT***

*The programme* ***“Uniting the Caribbean by Air and Sea”*** *will be implemented through actions in air and maritime transport, which might contribute, in an effective manner, to the expansion of intra-Caribbean trade and investment, multi-destination tourism, as well as functional cooperation in general among the Member States and Associate Members of the ACS.*

COMMENT:

The use of the word “might” in line two (2) of Section 3 (above) is noted and would recommend the phrase “is intended”. The word “might” connotes some uncertainty.

Connectivity within the Caribbean has been an ongoing issue and therefore efforts and actions by ACS through the programme “Uniting the Caribbean by Air and Sea” will be supported by Jamaica. As a tourism-dependent nation, multi-destination tourism is also of particular interest.

**3.2**   The Port and Maritime Strategy of the Greater Caribbean

With regards to the development of port infrastructures, minimum requirements should be identified based on market demands – for example handling equipment, yard space – RoRo/LoLo, bulk commodities.

* 1. Advancing the theme of Connectivity

*Work towards establishing a framework of activities with international partners to address and advance issues concerning air and maritime connectivity within the Greater Caribbean region.*

COMMENT:

The Government of Jamaica also supports this activity.

* + 1. Air Transport Agreement among Member States and Associate Members of the Association of Caribbean States

To continue to promote the implementation and update of the Agreement in order to meet the need of a general aviation policy for the Greater Caribbean, establishing a legal and co-operation framework that would offer more air service options with the reduction of costs and prices, more routes, more carriers and improved services; as well as ensuring the highest levels of operating security and safety for international civil aviation. Define cooperative actions with international agencies within the maritime and aviation sphere to enhance and facilitate connectivity within the region.

Ease of transport in the region will engender notable economic and social benefits for all Member States, given the opportunity it presents for greater cooperation in the areas of culture and tourism. Improvement in Air Transport will greatly facilitate the movements of goods throughout the Caribbean market, as well as the availability of services across the region.

As the current chairman of the Special Committee on Transport, Jamaica notes Cuba’s comments made in the previous draft document regarding the Air Transport Agreement, and agrees that even though not much progress was made in this area during the last biennium, advancements can be achieved over the next two years.

* + 1. Convene expert meetings under the theme of connectivity

*Establish a framework of activities to treat with issues of connectivity within the Caribbean region.*

**COMMENT**

The ACS agreement was adopted in Panama since February 12, 2004 but to date only one third (⅓) of states of the twenty-nine (29) states have ratified the agreement. Jamaica ratified the Agreement on September 19, 2009. This makes it difficult for airlines who want to operate to states that have not signed the agreement and in many instances opportunities are lost. A definite plan of action is needed to have the agreement ratified by majority of states that signed the air transport agreement. This will signal to airlines that the Caribbean is serious in resolving its connectivity issues and will lead to greater reliability in airlines route planning. This lay the platform in achieving the desired goal under 3.3 of achieving connectivity between sea and air.

A later objective would be to negotiate greater route rights between the states up to fifth (5th) freedoms.

**Multi-Destination Tourism**

This objective is desirable in a tourism market that is increasingly competitive. As a region with a rich cultural heritage and wonderful attractions we could benefit a well-structured arrangement where tourists arriving by leisure ships or aircraft could enjoy multiple experiences on one vacation. Packages could be competitive priced across destinations for maximum economic benefit. Air connectivity between states and intermodal connectivity between sea and air would be important elements in reducing the price of travel and timely connectivity. Also greater levels of commercial agreements between airlines of the region will be another important element in achieving timely connectivity which will ultimately enhance the tourist experience.

Notwithstanding the recognition that different Member & Associated States have varying air transport policies, efforts to liberalise the Multilateral Air Transport Agreement are to be pursued. For example, more liberal provisions in relation to (i) Designation, (ii) Ownership & Control & (iii) Tariffs. The flexibility in the existing Air Transport Agreement is noted in relation to 5th Freedom rights (which Jamaica has exercised) as well as the Community of Interest principle.

Greater consideration of the commercial/economic (airline) underpinnings for the provision of increased service options (i.e. routes, airlines & services) at low costs & prices in the region should be explored as they go further than the existence of a liberal Air Transport Agreement. The proposed legal and cooperation framework would take account of these findings to ensure that they facilitate and support the expansion of air services.

Therefore the proposal at 3.3.2 regarding expert meetings under the theme of connectivity would be useful in that regard.

**Section 4-** **Disaster Risk Reduction**

As Small Island Developing states, one of the major challenges that we face is our vulnerability to natural disasters. Consequently, Jamaica remains committed to proper risk management and regional disaster preparedness. Notwithstanding, the appropriation of resources and funds must be taken into consideration as plans are made to combat these threats.

**Section 5- The Caribbean Sea Commission**

The Government of Jamaica takes no issue with any of the provisions or proposals entailed in this section of the programme of action. We support the continued calls by Member States of the Caribbean Community for the declaration of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of the deliberations at the United Nations. Indeed, they have sought to advance the initiative via the biennial resolution on the matter, which is tabled in the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly. While supporting the language in para 5.1, we would wish to call for a clear timetable to be set for the ‘dialogue’ among Member States of the ACS, which will itself provide a clear statement of how we wish to proceed in advancing the initiative both within the ACS and through securing the support of other Member States of the international community via the mandates emanating from the biennial resolution in the Second Committee of the UNGA.

**Section 6 – Culture and Education**

Jamaica proposes that private universities and other higher education institutions be included in the collaboration if they were not already considered.

As it relates to the cost of the initiatives, Jamaica is seeking to clarify whether the individual institutions would be expected to underwrite the costs relating to the research activities as this may impact implementation.

We are also supporting the idea of virtual exchanges. The student teacher exchanges should be considered within the context of existing bi-national arrangements.