The Sixteenth Meeting of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) took place in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago on 14-15 May 2013, under the chairmanship of the Honourable Winston Dookeran, Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Council Meeting was attended by Senator the Hon. Maxine McClean, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados; Hon. Frederick Mitchell, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas; Hon. Wilfred Peter Elrington, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Attorney-General of Belize; Hon. Dr. Colin McIntyre, Minister of Employment, Trade, Industry, and Diaspora of the Commonwealth of Dominica; Hon. Nickolas Steele, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Business of Grenada; Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guyana; Hon. Arnold J. Nicholson, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica, Hon Patrice Nibett, Minister of Foreign Affairs of St Kitts and Nevis, Hon Dr. Douglas Slater, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Consumer Affairs of St Vincent and the Grenadines, H.E. Winston Lackin, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Suriname.

His Excellency Anthony Liverpool, Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented Antigua and Barbuda, while Mr. Peterson Noel, Special Envoy of the Republic of Haiti, represented his country; and Her Excellency June Soomer, Ambassador of Saint Lucia to CARICOM, represented her country. The OECS Secretariat was represented by His Excellency Anthony Severin, Head of International Relations.

In keeping with the tradition of engaging representatives of strategic partner countries to discuss political-economic and technical cooperation issues of mutual interest, and ongoing new partner countries, CARICOM Foreign Ministers held productive exchanges with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic and New Zealand, as well as with the Special Envoy of the Government of Japan.

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The Council considered the political and economic changes in the hemisphere and beyond, as well as critical issues that continue to impact CARICOM Member States. These include climate change, the continued negative effects of the global financial and economic crisis on regional economies, and disturbing trends with regard to development assistance such as graduation and differentiation, which result in diminishing access to aid and concessory funding. It was underlined that the criteria being used to assess eligibility for aid does not take ample account of the peculiarities and vulnerabilities of small island states (SIDS) that affect development.

In addition to addressing the above challenges, CARICOM Foreign Ministers deliberated on means to enhance the Community’s relations with critical, like-minded partner countries in order to safeguard the Community’s interests and positions. In this context, CARICOM’s relations with traditional and new partners were discussed as well as extending its outreach beyond the traditional spheres. The Foreign Ministers analysed the Region’s role and emphasized the contribution that CARICOM makes in multilateral fora such as the Organization of American States, the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Association of Caribbean States and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. They also focused on Community issues such as requests for associate membership, the situation in the Turks and Caicos Islands, and the border issues concerning Guyana and Venezuela, and Belize and Guatemala. The point was made that after twenty years of the integration process, there should be a departure from the past. It had become necessary to design a new architecture to move the process beyond its current limits, to widen and deepen the process. This would require proposals for financial flows, working with development financing institutions, for the logistics of transportation, for energy and food security and for education to empower youth, all within the framework for the convergence model.

Attention was paid to the decision making processes of the Council and of its Bureau, to enhance their effectiveness. In view of the increasing number of external engagements required of the members of the Council, and the resulting demands on the limited resources of Member States, the Council considered options to optimize CARICOM representation in these engagements when all Member States could not participate.

**Opening Ceremony**

A common theme in the remarks delivered during the opening ceremony was the significance of the 40th Anniversary of the Caribbean Community. The speakers focused on the progress made by the Region while recognizing that the Region continues to be confronted by a challenging environment.

In his statement the Secretary-General said that the Community found itself in an era of transition which is taking place within the context of a dynamic and rapidly changing global environment, all of which impinged on the formulation and coordination of the Community’s foreign policy.

In response to these changes, the Community must remain alert and proactive responsive to confront the realities. Survival in the current global environment demands a commonality of ambition and vision as well as a deep level of coordination to ensure the strategic position of the Community in the hemispheric and global arena.

In presenting remarks on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Suriname, the Representative stated that his country was committed to furthering the CARICOM integration process and deepening CARICOM’s relations with Latin America. He also called for greater South-South co-operation.
He took the opportunity to invite all Member States to CARIFESTA XI, to be hosted by Suriname from 16 – 25 August 2013.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, in reviewing the achievements of the Caribbean Community to date, highlighted CARICOM’s pivotal role at the forefront of such global issues as the fight against apartheid, the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and most recently, the conclusion of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

He opined that the era of diplomacy conducted in secrecy has come to an end and that diplomacy could no longer be confined to capitals but must embrace a wider cadre of participants including non state actors. He emphasized the need to strategize on how to derive real gains from diplomatic encounters and advance and expand the political and economic space of the Caribbean.

To adapt to this new diplomatic landscape, he posited, there is a need for the Region to develop a diplomatic corps equipped to advance the Region’s interests in this changing environment. To this end, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in partnership with the Institute of International Relations University of the University of the West Indies will establish a Diplomatic Academy.

The Minister emphasized the need for increased convergence and adjustment of traditional multilateral diplomatic practices to accommodate a multi-track approach to trade and investment relations.

**Relations with Third States**

Foreign Ministers discussed the Region’s relations with a number of partner countries which the Community is expected to engage at the bilateral level over the course of 2013.

Acknowledging the social, political and economic support that Venezuela has given CARICOM Member States and its peoples, Foreign Ministers underscored the importance of continuing positive relations with that country at the bilateral and the Community level.

The Council reviewed the ongoing cooperation activities with Mexico.

In preparation for coming meetings, discussions took place with regard to the agenda for the: Second CARICOM-Brazil Summit to be held in Paramaribo, Suriname; for the upcoming Fourth CARICOM-Cuba Meeting of Foreign Ministers to be held in Grenada later this year at a date to be confirmed; and for the forthcoming meeting with US Vice President Joe Biden later this month.
The Council considered the changing relationship between CARICOM and the European Union and emphasized the need to strengthen political dialogue between the parties.

The COFCOR acknowledged the strengthening of relations with a number of countries of South Asia and reviewed the Community's economic and political engagement with these countries.

The Council received an update on the ongoing negotiations for a CARICOM-Canada Free Trade and Development Agreement.

**Relations with International organizations**

In discussing the Community’s role within the ACS, the Council underlined the need for continued engagement in the work of that body and highlighted the importance placed by the Region on the work of the Caribbean Sea Commission previously chaired by Barbados.

With regard to the CELAC integration process, the Council emphasized the need to ensure full participation by CARICOM Member States and the CARICOM Secretariat as that body continues to take shape and consolidate. Further the Council underscored the importance of the guidance role of the Community’s representative on the Quartet of CELAC which sets the strategic direction for the grouping.

The Council received an in-depth presentation with regard to the present situation of the Organization of American States (OAS) and underlined the importance of its activities in the area of sustainable development and capacity building in preparation for the Community's participation in the forthcoming General Assembly on 4-6 June 2013 in Antigua, Guatemala.

Attention was also paid to the Twenty Third Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to be held in Sri Lanka in November of this year. Member States undertook to participate fully in that meeting.

Ministers recalled the Sipopo Declaration issued at the conclusion of the Seventh Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group held in Equatorial Guinea in December 2012. With regard to the EU’s new development policy, Ministers expressed concern that the implementation of differentiation in apportioning aid would result in a significant reduction of development assistance for ACP states.

The Council discussed matters of particular relevance to the Community being considered under the aegis of the United Nations. In view of decreasing attention being paid to the peculiarities and vulnerabilities of SIDS by the international community, the Council highlighted the importance of using several coming events as platforms to highlight and advocate for the interests of SIDS. These include the coming global negotiations on the post 2015 development agenda, the commemoration in 2014 of the year of Small Island States, the, as well as the Global Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to be held in Apia, Samoa, in 2014. In this latter regard the Foreign Ministers committed to fully participate in the preparatory meetings, including the regional meeting to be held in Jamaica in June of this year and the inter-regional meeting in Barbados in September.
Interaction with Representatives of Third States

The Council engaged the Foreign Minister of the Dominican Republic, the Hon. Carlos Morales Troncoso, in discussions to enhance relations between CARICOM and that country. Reference was made to deepening trade and economic relations and other efforts to continue the dialogue and to draw more closely together. In this regard, Minister Troncoso invited his colleague Ministers to participate in the upcoming CARIFORUM Ministerial Meeting to be held in June 2013 in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic.

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CARICOM Foreign Ministers also engaged the Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, His Excellency Murray McCully, on bilateral and regional cooperation between New Zealand and CARICOM Member States in such key areas as renewable energy, agriculture human resource development and Disaster management. The possibilities for greater cooperation between the Pacific and the Caribbean were highlighted. The Council noted Minister McCully’s presentation of New Zealand’s candidature for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the term 2015-2016.

The Council exchanged views with the Special Envoy of the Government of Japan, the Hon. Minoru Kiuchi, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Policy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the longstanding relationship between CARICOM and Japan. They welcomed the 2014 CARICOM-Japan Friendship Year which will mark the twentieth anniversary of this relationship. Amongst issues discussed were Security Council reform and Japan’s candidature for a 2016-2017 non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The Council welcomed the commitment expressed by Japan to “drastically increase assistance” to the Region. It was agreed that the Sixteenth CARICOM-Japan Consultation will be convened in July 2013.

Climate Change and the Environment

The Council reiterated the importance of having the issue of Climate Change remain on the agenda of CARICOM Meetings. The Council signaled CARICOM’s strong support for Trinidad and Tobago as it assumes the Co-Chair of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP), and commended the Government of Grenada for the excellent job that was done on behalf of the
region in its capacity as Chair of the Alliance of Small Island Developing States (AOSIS). The Council also discussed CARICOM’s preparations for the upcoming Conference of Parties (COP)-18 (Warsaw).

**Candidatures**

The COFCOR continued to underscore the importance of CARICOM’s participation in international bodies of importance to the Region, particularly where CARICOM’s representation is limited. Ministers endorsed a number of CARICOM candidatures in this regard.

**Signature and Ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty**

The Council welcomed the successful conclusion of the negotiations of the **Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)** by the United Nations in April 2013. In this regard they underlined the important role played by the Caribbean Community, working closely with a number of external partners, in this achievement. They agreed on the symbolic importance of the early signature and ratification of the Treaty by Member States of CARICOM. They expressed the expectation that the rigorous implementation of the Treaty will lead to the decrease in the illegal trade of Small Arms And Light Weapons (SALW) which contribute to increasing levels of crime and violence in the Region.

**Border Relations**

**Guatemala-Venezuela**

The Ministers noted that Guyana and Venezuela continued to enjoy excellent relations conducted through regular high level political consultations and a vibrant programme of functional cooperation.

They noted that both countries remained committed to the Good Offices Process of the United Nations Secretary General under the Geneva Agreement of 1966 and reaffirmed their support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Guyana.

**Belize-Guatemala**

The Council received an update on the efforts of Belize and Guatemala to find a final and definitive resolution to the Guatemala claim. They expressed concern that Guatemala is reneging on the agreement to hold a referendum on 6th October 2013 in accordance with the **Special Agreement between Belize and Guatemala to submit Guatemala's Territorial, Insular and Maritime claims to the International Court of Justice** of 2008, and emphasized the importance of preserving the Special Agreement which commits both parties to resorting to the International Court of Justice for a final determination of the Guatemalan claim. The Council urged the parties to set a new date for holding the simultaneous referendum in the shortest possible time and called on the international community to continue supporting the process under the Organization of American States and to engage the parties to assist in their efforts to reach a final settlement. They commended the OAS Secretary General for his Good Offices and for the role of the OAS in the Adjacency Zone.
Community Relations

The Council noted the updated on the situation in the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI), following the Island’s democratic elections held in November 2012 and underscored CARICOM’s commitment to supporting that Associate Member’s democratic tradition.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration of The Bahamas reiterated his country’s commitment to keeping the matter under constant review. The Foreign Ministers agreed that they would continue to monitor the situation in the TCI.

The Council further agreed that, with the leave of the Government of the United Kingdom and of TCI, a high-level fact finding mission would be fielded to the TCI.

The Council received a status update on progress towards the development of criteria to guide the Community’s consideration of requests for associate membership. They welcomed the expressions of interest by the French overseas territories of French Guiana, Guadeloupe ad Martinique and of the Dutch overseas countries of Curacao and St Maarten in associate membership of the Community. The Council looked forward to the earliest possible processing of these requests by the Community, account taken of the work still to be completed by the Technical Working Group established to this end.

Fiftieth Anniversary of the African Union

The COFCOR extended sincere congratulations to the African Union on the celebration of the organisation’s jubilee anniversary. The Council extended wishes for the Union’s continued commitment and success in the pursuit of the well being of the people of the African continent.

Appreciation

The Ministers expressed their deep appreciation to the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago for the warm hospitality, excellent arrangements and courtesies extended which greatly facilitated the fruitful deliberations of the Sixteenth Meeting of the COFCOR.