The Coast is Clear: Insights into the Role of the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard

On Wednesday 24th May 2013, students of the MSc course on Diasporic and Developmental Dimensions of Migration and four members of IIR Staff were treated to a visit to Staubles Bay, the headquarters of the Coast Guard situated on the Western most tip of the island of Trinidad. A trip behind the hallowed gates revealed an enlightening appreciation of the expansive roles which the Coast Guard plays in safeguarding our country and its citizens. As an island nation, one understands the requirement of having a marine element to the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, however patrolling our nation’s coastal waters is one of many vital services which comprise their duties. Other vital roles include logistical support to T & T Land Forces and aid to civil law enforcement, anti-smuggling and counter-narcotic operations (MOF), Port Security (ISPS Code), fisheries protection and enforcement, assistance in scientific research, pollution surveillance and enforcement (MPU&E), environmental protection, monitoring the safety of shipping, surveillance of the nation's off-shore installations, minor salvage and local maritime surveys as well as cooperating with other naval forces.

After an insightful presentation by Lt. Ray Frederick, the group was taken by Coast Guard vessel to the waters off Patos, the island rock that demarcates the maritime boundary between Trinidad and Venezuela. An oral tour of the islands off the coast and a panoramic view of the peninsula revealed how strategically located the base is, and allowed one to ponder the challenges of policing our maritime boundaries. The experience culminated with a sumptuous three course meal in the mess hall on the base, quite a fitting end to a thrill experience. After which, the Director of the Institute of International Relations, Prof W. Andy Knight, echoed the thanks expressed by Dr. Reis for an excellent presentation and tour. He exclaimed satisfactorily that “I believe that the students now have a much better appreciation of the job which the Coast Guards do in protecting the maritime boundaries of Trinidad and Tobago.” It was truly a remarkable experience.