

**Opening Remarks delivered by
Senator the Honourable Dennis Moses,
Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs of the Republic of
Trinidad and Tobago at the 20th Inter-sessional Preparatory
Meeting for the 23rd Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial
Council of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS),
Hyatt Regency, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
Wednesday 01 November, 2017**

His Excellency Raul Licausi, Vice Minister for the Caribbean in
the Ministry of Popular Power for Foreign Affairs of the
Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Chairman of the Ministerial
Council of the Association of Caribbean States,
Ambassador Dr June Soomer, Secretary General of the ACS,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

On behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I wish to extend to you a warm welcome to the 20th Inter-sessional Preparatory Meeting for the 23rd Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS).

Permit me at the outset, Mr. Chairman, to reiterate, on behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, our heartfelt condolences to and solidarity with the countries of the Greater Caribbean Region, following the devastation wrought by Hurricanes Irma, Maria and Nate earlier this year. The disastrous effects of these recent hurricanes have left most of us shocked and saddened, as we attempt to come to terms with the devastation that has been wrought upon the Greater Caribbean, including the significant number of lives lost.

Trinidad and Tobago commiserates with you in this difficult period. We are confident however, that the resilience of your

people will be of immense benefit as you seek to overcome the challenges presented by this tragedy.

The Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago also wish to reiterate our deepest sympathy to and solidarity with the Government and people of the United Mexican States on the catastrophic earthquakes, which struck in September. This disaster resulted in the tragic loss of hundreds of lives and significant destruction of and damage to property. It is our fervent hope that the spirit of camaraderie and resilience demonstrated by the Mexican people will remain a source of strength, as you forge ahead to rebuild and recover from this disaster. Our wishes and ardent prayers are with you, those who have been injured and the families who have suffered the loss of loved ones.

Mr. Chairman, Secretary General, Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

In returning to the subject of today's meeting, I take the opportunity to congratulate Venezuela on its efforts since assuming the Chairmanship of the Ministerial Council. Such efforts have served to reinforce Venezuela's commitment to the strengthening of the ACS, a commitment ever present from the very inception of the organisation.

Since our last Inter-sessional Preparatory Meeting, the Secretary General and the staff of the Secretariat have continued to demonstrate their dedication to the work of the Association. Our Secretary General, Dr Soomer, has embarked on several new initiatives over the past year that have benefitted the organisation greatly.

I wish to highlight one such initiative which was held last evening right here at the Hyatt Regency – the Inaugural ACS Excellence Lecture. The Lecture, entitled *“Towards an ACS Standard of Excellence in Coordination, Cooperation and Concerted Action in the Face of Disasters”* by Dr the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St Vincent and the

Grenadines. This shone the spotlight on the ACS and the important work being undertaken for the development of the Greater Caribbean Region.

The subject of the Inaugural Lecture was indeed apposite because we are meeting at a time when several of our sister Caribbean States and Territories have commenced the long and arduous process of reconstruction, as they struggle to emerge from the destruction suffered as a result of the recent natural disasters. There is no doubt that we must be prepared to confront these perennial challenges that have been exacerbated by Climate Change.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and other small States in the Greater Caribbean Region have a high degree of vulnerability and are affected disproportionately by natural disasters. In this regard, the work of the Special Committee on Natural Disasters assumes particular importance and provides a platform for regional cooperation as we seek to grapple with common threats.

Mr. Chairman, Secretary General, Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

My delegation wishes to acknowledge also the work undertaken by the various Committees and we look forward to receiving the Reports of the Chairmen of the Special Committees on the progress of their respective Work Programmes and the Report of the Chairman of the Council of National Representatives of the Special Fund. We also anticipate the Report of the Chair of the Working Group Established in accordance with paragraph 37 of the Declaration of Havana of the 7th ACS Summit.

The Caribbean Sea Commission is another critical area of special interest to Trinidad and Tobago. We recognize the impressive work being undertaken in the Commission's flagship project, "Impact Assessment of Climate Change on the Sandy Shorelines of the Caribbean: Alternatives for its control and resilience." A project of this nature reinforces the need for the

Region to combat the negative impact of Climate Change with approaches characterized by Resilience. Trinidad and Tobago will continue to actively support this project through our Focal Point at the Institute of Marine Affairs.

I also seize this opportunity to underscore the commitment of Trinidad and Tobago to multilateralism as the most appropriate instrument we can employ to face the challenges of the Greater Caribbean Region. Though the external environment, both regionally and globally has changed, the ACS remains as relevant today as when it was created. In this context, the onus lies on us, the representatives of Member Countries and Associate Members, to review, update and build on our past achievements as we chart a course for the improved welfare of our peoples.

Mr. Chairman of the Ministerial Council, Secretary General, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

As this 20th Inter-sessional Preparatory Meeting for the 23rd Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council deliberates on

the most appropriate action in support of the achievement of the strategic vision of the ACS, it is of paramount importance that we be ever mindful of the need for coordination of our efforts. It is imperative that we recognize our shared responsibility and acknowledge that the integration which we seek to achieve in the Greater Caribbean rests squarely on our collective shoulders. We each have our individual roles to play in addition to the roles which we play in partnership with one another, if we wish to fulfil our promises to the people of the Greater Caribbean.

In closing, I wish to thank all of you for your participation in this meeting and to state that your presence here today sends a strong signal of hope for the Greater Caribbean Region. I wish, therefore, to extend every good wish for fruitful deliberations.

Thank you very much.