

**Remarks delivered by Ms. Reita Toussaint, Acting
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign and
CARICOM Affairs on behalf of
Senator the Honourable Dennis Moses,
Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs,
at the Reception in Celebration of the 45th
Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic
Relations between Trinidad and Tobago and Cuba
- December 05, 2017**

It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to extend, on behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and on my own behalf, greetings on this occasion of the Forty-fifth (45th) Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Trinidad and Tobago and Cuba on December 08, 1972.

Four and a half decades after that historic event, it behooves me to mention that in October 1972, at the conclusion of the Seventh Heads of Government Conference of Commonwealth Caribbean Countries held in Port of Spain, the Prime Ministers of Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago issued a Statement which in part read as follows:

“The independent English-speaking Caribbean States, exercising their sovereign rights to enter into relations with any other sovereign States and pursuing their determination to seek regional solidarity and to achieve meaningful and comprehensive economic cooperation amongst all Caribbean countries, will seek the early establishment of relations with Cuba, whether economic or diplomatic or both.”

On this special occasion, it is important for us to reflect on the intrepid step taken by the then newly-independent Commonwealth Caribbean States in December 1972. In this regard, we must bear in mind that Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago became independent in 1962, just a decade earlier, and Barbados and Guyana acceded to independence in 1966. Moreover, there were certain geo-political realities extant at that time for the international community was riven by the Cold War and this affected the state of hemispheric relations.

In spite of such realities, Trinidad and Tobago and its regional partners were determined to play their part in contributing to the alleviation of the hemispheric and global isolation of Cuba. The

leaders of Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago were also keen to acknowledge Cuba as an integral part of the Caribbean family, a family which, though separated by the cultures and languages of our colonizers, is nevertheless joined together by a common heritage.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Significantly, the initiative by Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago in 1972 to establish diplomatic relations with Cuba marked an instance of foreign policy coordination prior to the establishment of CARICOM in 1973. Also, it is a little known fact that Cuba was among the Observer States that attended the Special Conference of Heads of Government of the Independent Commonwealth Countries for the purpose of signing the Caribbean Community Treaty, held in Chaguaramas, Trinidad and Tobago on 04th July, 1973. The presence of the then Foreign Minister of Cuba, His Excellency Dr. Raul Roa, lent a particular distinction to that occasion.

As we celebrate the Forty-fifth (45th) Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, and CARICOM-Cuba Day, it is only natural for us to reflect on the proud legacy and accomplishments of Trinidad and Tobago's relations with Cuba at the bilateral level as well as within the framework of CARICOM. Our mutually rewarding relationship with Cuba has been nurtured over the years in the joint pursuit of our common goals.

The Trinidad and Tobago-Cuba bilateral relationship is characterised by mutual respect and sustained cooperation in diverse areas namely, health, sport, education, disaster risk reduction, culture and agriculture. The Government of Cuba has also continued to offer scholarships to nationals of Trinidad and Tobago in the field of human medicine. At present, we are working on another dimension of our relationship by pursuing collaboration in the area of tourism.

Trinidad and Tobago audiences and artistes were exposed to the rich tapestry of Cuban culture when in early March of this year,

El Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba (The National Folkloric Group of Cuba) visited our shores. This cultural exchange was the fruit of the labour of many interested stakeholders - the Success Laventille Secondary School, the Embassy of the Republic of Cuba, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, among others. Notably, Trinidad and Tobago has seized the opportunity to expand the reach of the national instrument by promoting the development of steel orchestras in Cuba.

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Trinidad and Tobago also enjoys a vibrant commercial alliance with Cuba and participation in the annual *Feria Internacional de La Habana* (FIHAV) – the Havana International Trade Fair, has provided excellent opportunities for Trinidad and Tobago’s businesses to enter the Cuban market. Fittingly, FIHAV has served as the backdrop for the finalization of major business transactions between Trinidad and Tobago companies and Cuban entities.

There is an existing Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement (TECA) between CARICOM and Cuba, the main objective of which is the strengthening of commercial and economic relations between the Parties. A noteworthy achievement in 2017 was the signing of the Second Protocol to the CARICOM-Cuba TECA in Georgetown, Guyana on November 09.

Under the Second Protocol, Cuba will expand duty free access to more than 320 items including meat, fish, dairy products, fruits, vegetables, beer, rum, cement, soap and apparel. Whilst, CARICOM will grant duty free access to some 50 items, including fish, pharmaceutical products, fertilizers and articles of iron and steel.

Alas, during the 2017 hurricane season, the Region witnessed extreme climate events as storms formed with more intensity and frequency. Despite being directly impacted by Hurricane Irma, Cuba, in an act of humanity, offered assistance to affected Caribbean States. Our fellow CARICOM Member States of Antigua and Barbuda and Dominica, among others, have been

fortunate to be on the receiving end of Cuba's generosity and goodwill.

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Over time, the CARICOM-Cuba partnership has been bolstered through encounters at the political and diplomatic level in the CARICOM – Cuba Summits and Meetings of Foreign Ministers. This year, I had the pleasure of participating in the Fifth Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of CARICOM and Cuba held on March 11th in Havana where deliberations focused on the further strengthening of economic and trade ties as well as cooperation in areas including, transportation and tourism, agriculture and natural disasters. In the coming days, I will be representing Trinidad and Tobago at the Sixth CARICOM-Cuba Summit to be held in Antigua and Barbuda, where I look forward to engaging in further discussions.

Also, at the political and diplomatic level, Trinidad and Tobago values its relationship with Cuba within the framework of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and the Community of

Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). Collaboration in these fora provides tangible demonstration of our dedication to regional and hemispheric integration.

In April 2015, in Panama, another step towards Cuba's re-integration into the hemispheric fold was taken when the President of Cuba participated in the Summit of the Americas for the first time. Further, within the context of the United Nations (UN), Trinidad and Tobago stands in defence of the sovereignty of Cuba in accordance with the principles enshrined in the UN Charter and regularly adds its voice to the calls for an end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba.

Before concluding, it would be remiss of me not to mention that forty-five years ago, the leaders of Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, found in their counterpart in Cuba, the late President Fidel Castro Ruz, a willing partner who engaged with them in a manner characterized by mutual respect and solidarity. Time after time, President Castro acknowledged the courageous step taken by Trinidad and Tobago and the other three independent English-speaking Caribbean States in 1972

and worked assiduously towards the consolidation and expansion of the CARICOM-Cuba relationship.

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As we celebrate the Forty-fifth Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Trinidad and Tobago and Cuba, and CARICOM-Cuba Day, I wish to take this opportunity to reaffirm the commitment of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to the strengthening of existing ties with Cuba and to the building of new bridges as we forge ahead. There have been many milestones along this journey that we embarked on with our Cuban friends in 1972, and our relationship has survived and blossomed into a partnership at the bilateral and regional levels. Indeed, we look forward to continued efforts to provide mutual support to one another, as we forge ahead on bilateral objectives and collectively with our regional goals.

In closing, I wish to thank the Ambassador of Cuba for his gracious invitation to attend this reception. Let me also take this

opportunity to extend best wishes to all of you for the Festive Season.

¡Salud!

*Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs
Port of Spain
Trinidad and Tobago
28th November, 2017*