

PLENARY STATEMENT

BY

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE DENNIS
MOSES, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AND
CARICOM AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

II MEETING OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE CELAC-CHINA FORUM

SANTIAGO, CHILE

JANUARY 22ND, 2018

***“CELAC-China: Working for more Development, Innovation and Cooperation for our
peoples”***

Your Excellency Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's
Republic of China;

Your Excellency Heraldo Muñoz, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Chile;

Your Excellency Victor Manuel Valle, Ambassador of the Republic of El Salvador in Chile, representing the Pro Tempore President of CELAC;

Other distinguished colleague Ministers of Foreign Affairs;

Esteemed Heads of Delegation;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I wish to commence my contribution by paying tribute to the Government and the people of Chile for hosting us in the beautiful city of Santiago and for having so generously devoted their time to ensuring that we have an environment conducive to successfully discharging our responsibilities.

It is with immense pleasure that I address this Second Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the China-CELAC Forum. This second Ministerial Meeting is an expression of the continued growth and deepening of the relations between the Latin American and Caribbean region and the People's Republic of China. As our theme would suggest, the two sides are natural partners in development, innovation and cooperation and we all stand to benefit from advancing an agenda to leverage the potential of collaboration in these important areas. This meeting affords us an opportunity to make firm strides towards this objective and to assess progress made since the first Ministerial in 2015.

For Trinidad and Tobago, it has been and will continue to be a priority to preserve and consolidate the existing warm friendship with the People's Republic of China. Our relationship dates back to the year 1806 when the first wave of Chinese immigrants to Trinidad and Tobago arrived, adding to the distinctive cultural landscape of the country. While sharing history, heritage and past, we are also determined to shape a better present and future through ongoing cooperation activities.

Throughout our partnership of almost 44 years, Trinidad and Tobago and China have enjoyed a broad and diverse relationship, built on like-minded values, close diplomatic links, mutually-beneficial engagement, important and growing economic relations and the exchange of high-level visits. Despite these successes, Trinidad and Tobago is of the view that the potential of this partnership is far greater than what has already been attained. Trinidad and Tobago is therefore prepared to support any initiative at the regional level that will contribute to expanding opportunities for our peoples and advancing our common values.

This obliges all of us to look closely at where we need to join forces and cooperate on the basis of a shared destiny, shared interests and shared rewards. As an ancient Chinese adage goes, "The greatest ideal is to create a world truly shared by all."

From climate change to human rights, from peace and security to food security, we are so much stronger when we support each other and face these complex challenges as joint tenants of planet earth. The imperative of joining forces in defined areas is reflected in one of the two outcome documents we will adopt later today, the China-CELAC Action Plan 2019-2021. This Plan identifies goals and activities which, if properly implemented, should lead to concrete results in critical areas such as Policy and Security; Trade, Investment and Finance; Infrastructure and

Transport; Agriculture; Environment and Climate Change. The Plan itself is buttressed by the Santiago Declaration, which is the overall manifestation of the political commitment of both sides to mutually beneficial cooperation on global issues.

Although Trinidad and Tobago attaches great importance to all the areas of cooperation mentioned in the Action Plan, I will focus my observations to the realm of security, given Trinidad and Tobago's responsibility for this topic in the quasi-Cabinet of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

For Small Island Developing States, new areas of vulnerability added to the traditional and inherent ones have heightened the tension between scarce resources and vast needs. In terms of traditional security concerns, transnational organized crime continues to take a toll on the region. Chief among these are human trafficking, illegal drug trafficking, illicit trafficking in firearms and weaponry, money laundering and the proliferation of criminal gangs, with often severe consequences for local populations. Grappling with pre-existing material, financial and human resource constraints, Caribbean States face major challenges in plugging porous borders and are far more susceptible to disruption by criminal networks than larger and more developed economies.

A range of non-traditional security concerns have also emerged as existential threats to the Caribbean, with climate change ranking foremost among them. Climate change, it is acknowledged, acts as a risk multiplier, making existing security and development challenges more severe. Across the region, we must contend with the increase in temperatures, rising sea levels and the evident increase in extreme weather patterns and weather events, with their impact on important ecological and economic sectors. Put together, these factors led to devastation in 2017 of an

unprecedented magnitude, diminishing decades of development gains in a matter of hours.

Scientific evidence suggests that Trinidad and Tobago has already experienced an increase in mean surface temperature of about 1.7° C, based on meteorological data for the years between 1961- 2008. The projected impacts of climate change for the region and Trinidad and Tobago over the next few decades include a reduction in the frequency of precipitation events, but a noticeable increase in their intensity. Last year, Trinidad and Tobago experienced heavy rainfall associated with tropical storm Bret, resulting in widespread flooding throughout the country, which was followed by many other occurrences of floods and landslides due to increased rainfall intensity during the rainy season¹.

Though only a few weeks into 2018, it is already evident that this pattern will continue, with heavy rains recently causing a massive landslide along a route to a popular tourist destination, temporarily isolating a community and leaving motorists stranded. The impacts of climate-related disasters are therefore a lived reality. Not limited to economic losses in the form of infrastructural damage, we also suffer the loss of agricultural crops and livestock and of course, the increase in the price of goods which inevitably occurs with high demand and limited supplies.

While we persist in our efforts to achieve sustainable development in spite of the undermining effects of multidimensional security concerns and the limited resources at our disposal, it is important that I place on record Trinidad and Tobago's appreciation to the People's Republic of China as a reliable and supportive partner.

¹ Source: Ministry of Planning and Development

Before closing, I wish to comment briefly on China's initiative for a modern-day silk road, known as 'One Belt, One Road' (OBOR), which is a major element of Chinese foreign policy. Trinidad and Tobago was fortunate to be participate in the "The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation", held in Beijing in May 2017. Described by President Xi Jinping as the "project of the century", Trinidad and Tobago welcomes the Belt and Road initiative as an opportunity to strengthen ties with China and highly values the positive implications of this initiative for people-to-people contacts, cultural exchanges, trade and tourism.

Permit me to express, in the name of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the most sincere wish that the discussions and agreements resulting from this meeting will positively contribute to the consolidation of the aims of the China-CELAC Forum and to the philosophy and spirit underlying it.

I thank you.