

STATEMENT

BY

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

MEETING BETWEEN CHINA AND CARIBBEAN STATES ON THE
MARGINS OF THE

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

SANTIAGO, CHILE

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

Distinguished colleague Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM);

Ladies and Gentlemen:

A pleasant afternoon to you all.

It is a pleasure to make a brief contribution during this encounter between CARICOM Foreign Ministers and our esteemed counterpart from the People's Republic of China.

Your Excellency, I am sure that you will agree that Trinidad and Tobago and China have formed a resilient friendship, one rooted in the historical links formed through the emigration of Chinese citizens to Trinidad and Tobago over 210 years ago and bolstered by the establishment of diplomatic ties since June 1974. However, as with many relationships, we cannot rely solely on the foundation of our history to forge a better future. In this regard, our countries have worked closely over the years to develop a forward-looking partnership steeped in the tenets of trust, respect and mutual benefit.

At the regional level, we have similar ambitions to develop the relationship to its maximum potential. I would therefore like to underscore that Trinidad and Tobago finds it desirable and useful to maintain an ongoing Caribbean-China interface, even as we continue to actively pursue cooperation activities as part of the broader CELAC construct. Although geographically close to Latin America, the Caribbean's interests and concerns are specific and unique and thus deserving of special attention. I would therefore like to register Trinidad and Tobago's great appreciation

to the Chinese authorities for acknowledging this dynamic by organizing our current engagement.

Some of the challenges faced by region are new, while others have been around for a long time. All in all, threats to sustainable development in the Caribbean abound, be they financial, economic, social or environmental. Throughout our history, we have been obliged to devise innovative solutions to confront the toughest challenges. However, in many areas of relevance to the sustainable development agenda, there has been only incremental progress to report. Lamentably, even where such progress exists, it is often eroded by the emergence of external shocks and global realities and challenges that are automatically heightened in region.

China has been a reliable friend to Trinidad and Tobago and to the region, unstinting in its willingness and openness to share its development experience and welcome its partners to participate in the new engines of China's future development. This latter point was, in fact, the underlying spirit of the convening of the "The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation", held in Beijing in May 2017, at which Trinidad and Tobago was represented. We believe that that this far-reaching initiative, aptly described as the "project of the century", opens the door to strengthening ties with China at the regional level, particularly as it relates to infrastructural projects that can boost people-to-people contacts, cultural exchanges, trade, tourism and even disaster relief efforts.

For example, improving intra-regional transportation continues to be an important priority for our Community and is thus reflected in CARICOM's Strategic Plan 2015-2019 as one of the sectors to build competitiveness and unleash key economic drivers. Transport and mobility clearly play a fundamental role in today's world. It is at the very heart of the supply chain

and is essential for generating and accelerating growth, not to mention enhancing Caribbean identity and cohesion. Trinidad and Tobago is convinced that that we can usefully consider developing a project with China, a world leader in shipping services, to promote mobility that is efficient, safe, secure and environmentally friendly, serving the needs of citizens and business across the region. The role of maritime transportation in the disaster relief response is also worth emphasizing here, as ships were lifelines of relief items and services, following the trail of destruction left across the Caribbean due to the impact of hurricanes Irma and Maria last year.

Another infrastructural project of importance at the regional level is the development of a Single CARICOM ICT Space. Conceptualized as the digital layer of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), its Work Plan and Budget were approved by CARICOM Heads last July. The activities of the work plan focus on areas such as conducting gap analyses, public awareness, specific telecommunications issues, legal and regulatory reform, cyber security, bringing technology to the people, resource mobilisation, as well as forecasting for the CARICOM Digital Agenda 2025. Trinidad and Tobago sees value in seeking China's support in advancing this initiative through the provision of resources and technical cooperation.

These are but two examples in a vast sea of diverse and exciting regional projects that we can look at more closely together. Other useful starting points can emanate from the work programmes of CARICOM specialized agencies, many of which operate in the areas of priority interest. Fleshing out these proposals in writing and discussing them with you further in the near future are logical next steps to which I hope we can all agree.

I conclude by expressing my confidence that CARICOM and China will continue to enhance their relationship, demonstrate commitment, seek new opportunities and pursue agreed objectives as we work toward strengthening our friendship and relationship.

I thank you.