

**Opening 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 of the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the
21st Inter-sessional Preparatory Meeting for the
24th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the
Association of Caribbean States (ACS),
Hilton Hotel, Port of Spain, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Thursday 25th October, 2018**

H.E. Valdrack Jaentschke, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of
Nicaragua and Chairman of the Executive Board of the
Ministerial Council,

Ambassador Dr June Soomer, Secretary General of the ACS,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

It is indeed a pleasure to welcome all of you, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, to the 21st Inter-sessional Preparatory Meeting for the 24th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS). Your presence in Port of Spain attests to the commitment of the Association's membership to the pursuit of sustainable development through the promotion of trade, transport and sustainable tourism, the prevention and mitigation of natural disasters as well as the optimization of the resources and opportunities presented to us by our common patrimony, the Caribbean Sea.

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 Government and People of the Republic of Haiti, on the loss of life and destruction of property occasioned by the earthquake that struck that sister State on 07th October, 2018. I wish to extend condolences to the families who lost their loved ones,

and best wishes for the full and speedy recovery of the injured. During this trying period of rebuilding and recovery, Trinidad and Tobago stands with Haiti, ready to assist to the extent possible.

Allow me to take this opportunity to commend Nicaragua on its stewardship of the work of the Ministerial Council since assuming the Chairmanship earlier this year. Trinidad and Tobago is indeed grateful for your efforts in furtherance of the strengthening of our organization and reposes confidence in your ability to continue to guide us in our endeavours to take the ACS forward.

The delegation of Trinidad and Tobago also wishes to acknowledge the dedication of the Secretary General and the staff of the Secretariat for their contributions to the work of the Association. Your effective discharge of your responsibilities enables the organisation to achieve its core objectives.

Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to the ACS and is honoured to serve as the seat of the organization. We are

pleased to provide a 'home away from home' for personnel from across the Greater Caribbean Region and welcome this eclectic mix of cultures which enhance the cosmopolitan flavour of Trinidad and Tobago.

At our last Inter-Sessional Preparatory Meeting held in November 2017, we made proposals to our Ministers in pursuit of a revitalised ACS, consistent with the mandates issued by our Heads of State and Government at their Seventh Summit in Havana, Cuba in 2016. The Ministerial Council subsequently met in Isla Margarita, Venezuela in March 2018, and elected the Executive Boards of the Ministerial Council, Special Committees and Council of National Representatives of the Special Fund and, in addition to taking decisions on the way forward in the process of revitalisation, approved the application of the British Virgin Islands (The BVI) as an Associate Member of the ACS.

Today, we are once more convened to prepare for the 24th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council to be held in 2019. We look forward to receiving the reports of the Chairman of the

Ministerial Council, Secretary General and Chairmen of the Special Committees on the progress on their respective work programmes. We also await with pleasure, the reports on the Caribbean Sea Commission, Council of National Representatives of the Special Fund and the Budget and Administration of the Association.

Equally important before us on the Agenda, is the consideration of the nominations to fill two posts of Directors in the Secretariat. These Directors will head the newly-established Directorate for Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation and the Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development.

It will be recalled that these Directorates are the by-products of our deliberations on the restructuring of the Secretariat. It is my view that they represent the willingness of the Association's membership to develop new constructs which exemplify our embrace of the inter-dependent and intertwined nature of the pillars of our organisation.

Trinidad and Tobago is confident that delegations will recommend the best candidates for these posts. In this regard, I say to all of us here today, that the proverbial ball is in our court and we must grasp the opportunity before us, as we strive collectively to chart a course for the improved well-being of our peoples.

In closing, I wish to thank you all for your participation in this meeting and extend every good wish for successful deliberations. Since today is October 25th, I also take this opportunity to extend best wishes for the up-coming Festive Season.

I thank you.

*Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs
Port of Spain
October 25, 2018*