



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs

MESSAGE BY

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MINISTER OF FOREIGN AND CARICOM AFFAIRS

To COMMEMORATE CARICOM-CUBA DAY

December 08, 2016



I am indeed honoured to extend on behalf of the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago, and my own behalf, commemorative greetings on this occasion of CARICOM-Cuba Day. Today marks the 44th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations on December 08 1972 between Cuba and Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. This intrepid step by the then newly-independent Commonwealth Caribbean States contributed to the alleviation of the hemispheric and global isolation of Cuba.

On this special occasion, 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 and 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. Working in conjunction with local medical

personnel, the Cuban Medical Brigade has impacted the lives of our citizens in a positive and tangible manner. The Government of Cuba has also continued to offer scholarships to nationals of Trinidad and Tobago in the field of human medicine.

In the area of sport, mention must be made of outstanding performances by one of our nationals in the Summer Olympic Games held in London, United Kingdom and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012 and 2016, respectively. These outstanding performances were achieved under the guidance and training of a Cuban coach.

The seeds of cultural cooperation between Trinidad and Tobago and Cuba have taken root and there exists the potential for further collaboration in the areas of culture and tourism through impending agreements. 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.

Trinidad and Tobago also enjoys a vibrant commercial alliance with Cuba. This year, from October 31 to November 04, a Trinidad and Tobago Delegation of thirty-four (34) companies participated in the annual Feria Internacional de La Habana (FIHAV) - Havana International Trade Fair. This participation in FIHAV 2016 has contributed to the further development of commercial ties with Cuba, the promotion of trade and enhanced cooperation on matters related to energy between both countries.

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. Over time, the CARICOM-Cuba partnership has been fortified through diplomatic encounters in the CARICOM –Cuba Summits and Meetings of Foreign Ministers, as well as the pursuit of cooperation under various Agreements.

In December 1993, the ties between CARICOM and Cuba were further strengthened when both Sides signed an Agreement establishing the CARICOM-Cuba Joint Commission under which they engage in cooperation in the economic, social, cultural and technological spheres. In July 2000, CARICOM and Cuba concluded a CARICOM-Cuba Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement (TECA), while an Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between CARICOM and Cuba was signed in 2005. Both Sides are currently engaged in discussions aimed at improving the implementation of the TECA whose main objective is the strengthening of commercial and economic relations between the Parties.

The CARICOM-Cuba Summits process has also been responsible for bolstering the relationship even further. At the First CARICOM-Cuba Summit held in Havana, Cuba on December 08, 2002, the Havana Declaration was adopted and introduced, *inter alia*,

the convening of a Summit every three (3) years and the designation of December 08 as CARICOM-Cuba Day.

The Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth CARICOM-Cuba Summits were held in Bridgetown, Barbados in 2005, Santiago de Cuba, Cuba in 2008, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago in 2011 and Havana, Cuba in 2014, respectively. These Summits have served as a platform for both Sides to collaborate on addressing mutual challenges and to foster cooperation which are vital for achieving stability and growth in the Caribbean.

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has manifested its commitment to CARICOM-Cuba relations by participating in all five CARICOM-Cuba Summits to date. Most importantly, it will be recalled that Trinidad and Tobago welcomed President Raúl Castro Ruz to a State Visit on December 07, 2011 and hosted the Fourth CARICOM-Cuba Summit on December 08, 2011.

CARICOM Member States and Cuba belong to a number of regional and international organisations where we collaborate on matters of mutual interest. Cuba's active membership in the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) illustrates its dedication to regional and hemispheric integration. Moreover, Cuba's hosting of the Second CELAC Summit in January 2014 was viewed as a significant milestone in that country's hemispheric geopolitical role.

A further testament of Cuba's re-integration into the hemispheric family was that country's first ever participation in the Summits of the Americas process at the Seventh (7th) Summit of the Americas held in Panama City, Panama in April 2015. Such a historic development was attributed to the thaw in relations between Cuba and the United States of America, a process for which CARICOM has expressed its full support.

More recently, on June 04, 2016, Cuba hosted the Seventh (7th) Summit of Heads of State and/or Government of the ACS in its capital city, Havana. The theme of the Summit was *"Together for a Sustainable Caribbean"*. Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, participated in that Summit and also held fruitful bilateral discussions with President Castro.

On a more sombre note, I wish to refer to the recent passing of the former President of Cuba and leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz, upon whom was bestowed an honorary award of the Order of the Caribbean Community in 2008 – the first non-national of CARICOM to be granted the award. Mr. Fidel Castro Ruz was an iconic figure of his generation and his contribution to regional, hemispheric and international politics and South-South cooperation was, without question, impactful.

As we celebrate CARICOM-Cuba Day today, I wish to take this opportunity to extend to the Government and People of the Republic of Cuba our best wishes for the continued growth and prosperity of their nation and to re-affirm CARICOM's commitment to further strengthening the bonds of friendship, cooperation and solidarity between the Republic of Cuba and the Member States of CARICOM.



Plenary Session held during the V CARICOM-Cuba Summit held in Havana, Cuba on December 08, 2014.



His Excellency Raúl Castro, President of the Council of State of Cuba and the President of the Council of Ministers of Cuba greets the Honourable Gaston Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, and then Chairman of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) at the V CARICOM-Cuba Summit held in Havana, Cuba on December 08, 2014.



His Excellency Raúl Castro, President of the Council of State of Cuba and the President of the Council of Ministers of Cuba, addresses Heads of Government at the IV CARICOM-Cuba Summit held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, on December 08. 2011.



His Excellency Raúl Castro, President of the Council of State of Cuba and the President of the Council of Ministers of Cuba greets Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in June 2016 in Havana, Cuba during the VII Summit of Heads of State and/or Government of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS).