

**The Honourable Bridgid Mary Annisette-George, MP
Speaker of the House of Representatives**

**Opening Remarks
at the**

**Third Meeting of the CARIFORUM-EU Parliamentary Committee
under the CARIFORUM - EU Economic Partnership Agreement**

October 31 -November 1, 2017

Hyatt Regency Hotel

Salutations

- **Senator the Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon, Minister of Trade and Industry, Government of Republic of Trinidad and Tobago;**
- **Other Government Ministers of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago;**
- **The Hon. Eileen Alix Boyd-Knights, Speaker of the House of Assembly of the Commonwealth of Dominica;**
- **Other Presiding Officers, Ministers, Parliamentarians and Members of the Legislative Assemblies of the Caribbean Region,**
- **Chairman of the EU Delegation and Parliamentary Member of the European Conservative and Reformist Group, Mr. Boleslaw G. Piecha;**
- **Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps;**
- **Representatives and Parliamentary Groups of the European Union;**
- **Representatives of the CARIFORUM Secretariat;**
- **Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago;**
- **Representatives of Civil Society, Interest Groups and Observers;**
- **Senior Technocrats and Specialists;**
- **Guests;**
- **Members of the Media;**

- **The Staff of the Minister of Trade and Industry and the European Union; and**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Good morning!

It is my pleasure to bring Opening remarks at this 3rd Meeting of the CARIFORUM-EU Parliamentary Committee and while Port of Spain may be unfamiliar to some of us gathered here, it is no stranger as a location for the CARIFORUM-EU Parliamentary Committee as this presents the second occasion in succession that this meeting is being hosted in Trinidad and Tobago.

Undeniably the Member countries of CARIFORUM and of the EU have had a long history of trade and one may opine that the rational for our early encounter lay in the pursuit of trade. While the relationship between CARIFORUM members and EU members has transformed politically over the centuries, trade, though now founded on very

different principles, has remained a mutually important and significant pillar.

The main objective of the Cotonou Agreement, as reflected in its Article 1, of poverty reduction and the eventual integration of the African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) countries into the world economy, remains as relevant in 2017 as it was 17 years ago and it may be reasonable to conclude that that objective may have foreshadowed Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The overall objectives of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) conceived out of Cotonou:

- the liberalization of trade,
- enhanced opportunities for increasing investment,
- providing private sector initiatives; and
- increasing supply capacity, competitiveness and economic growth, are critical to the survival of the CARIFORUM members

and in particular for the diversification thrust of Trinidad and Tobago.

The fact that in 2008 Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Surinam, Trinidad & Tobago, and the Dominican Republic followed by Haiti in 2009 signed onto the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement bears testimony to the importance of trade with EU members. After all, CARIFORUM's second largest trade supplier, after the United States of America, is the EU, recognising that I have deliberately refrained from use of the term "trading partner". Conceptually, therefore, the EPA provides a platform to attain some equilibrium in the trading relationship.

It is quite apparent, however, that from the structural design of the EPA the partners were well aware to use a cliché that "*the devil is in*

the details” so although the Parliamentary Committee was not invested with decision making authority, it has been mandated to provide views and recommendations and also to carry out for the EPA one of the core functions of Parliaments which is the monitoring/oversight function.

It is no secret that there have been challenges and impediments in effecting the EPA to the mutual benefit of the partners and no doubt the Parliamentary Committee at this meeting shall discharge its obligation to engage in lively and qualitative deliberations aimed at providing recommendations, if not for the resolution, but certainly for the dilution, of the challenges and impediments which exist in the furtherance of the EPA in the best interests their nationals and the sustainability of their respective economies.

We may recall that in the Joint Declaration issued on 3rd April 2013 at the Second Meeting of CARIFORUM–EU of this Committee, the

Members strongly welcomed and supported the lifting of the Schengen Visa for CARIFORUM nationals visiting the EU.

The task we face while formidable is not an insurmountable one and while the EPA provides us with our unique challenges, we are encouraged that the potential opportunities can be realised. EU Trade Commissioner Ms. Cecilia Malmström cautioned members of the African Caribbean and Pacific countries (of which the CARIFORUM Region is a sub region), in her recent speech in Brussels at the Roundtable *'Putting Partnership into Practice'* that *"the benefits from development-oriented trade agreements do not emerge overnight"*, but she assured that the benefits *"materialise in the long term."*

In support of her optimism, Commissioner Malmström provided some results given the right environment flowing from the EPAs and I quote as follows:

- *In the case of Madagascar, in the year 2012 a trade agreement between the EU and Eastern and Southern Africa countries came into force and by 2016 exports from that country to the EU, increased by 65%.*
- *In the case of South Africa in 2016, an economic partnership agreement between the EU and Southern Africa (SADC) commenced and South Africa's exports in processed fish have since risen by over 16% and flowers by over 20%.*
- *In the case of Papua New Guinea, the EPA with the Pacific Regions assisted in attracting investment in the country's fisheries industry with multiplier effects particularly job creation for women.*

These are positive indicators that should motivate us to continue our dialogue, with the objective of painstakingly finding recommendations, which we can make to the Joint Council for the operational and procedural advancement of the EPA during their deliberations which are scheduled to take place later this month. Some of the challenges are old such as market access, meaningful market presence and the activation of the Protocol on Cultural

Cooperation and because the world environment is dynamic other challenges are evolving such as the implications of Brexit. All are very pertinent in the context of the EPA.

In I welcome you all to Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago and I know this venue shall provide a conducive atmosphere for productive and progressive deliberations and for the attainment of consensus on the way forward.

I thank you!

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