

# **Remarks by Ambassador Irwin LaRocque, Secretary General, CARICOM at the Opening Ceremony of the IV CARICOM-Cuba Summit**

We of the Caribbean Community and Cuba meet on this auspicious day, 8 December 2011, which has been designated CARICOM-Cuba Day. Thirty-nine years ago on this date, the leaders of Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago took the bold step of formally recognising the Republic of Cuba, at a time when most of the countries in the hemisphere did not. They exercised their sovereign right to choose with whom they could establish relations and it is a sovereignty which evidently we must continue to guard jealously even today.

It has become traditional for us to mark this day by celebrating the prized CARICOM-Cuba relationship. Furthermore, the Heads of State and Government of CARICOM and Cuba agreed in 2002, to hold a Summit on this day every three years in order to ensure sustained political dialogue at the highest level.

This tradition is not simply a triennial routine, nor a mere well-meaning gesture of goodwill. It is both a commemoration and a means of exploring further avenues to extend the tangible cooperation that bold diplomacy and true friendship facilitate.

The Member States of the Caribbean Community have maintained their unwavering support for the Republic of Cuba in various international fora and take pride in being pioneers in embracing our Caribbean brothers and sisters. To us in CARICOM, this action demonstrates our belief in the concept of one Caribbean indivisible.

As a result of this co-operation, through scholarships offered by Cuba the Region has seen an increase in the number of persons trained in a range of areas including health, engineering, agriculture, sports and culture making a positive contribution to the Community's development. Further, the establishment of clinics and the provision of personnel by Cuba in many of our territories have complemented our health, education and cultural sectors. Indeed, the CARICOM-Cuba joint initiatives have caused our countries to grow closer and this Region to become more integrated.

In addition, institutional arrangements have been established to strengthen the ties by way of a Joint Commission and under a Trade and Economic Co-operation Agreement.

Mr Chairman, Excellencies Heads of State and Government, CARICOM-Cuba Day is an acknowledgement of the achievements which have resulted from our relationship; a day to declare our recognition of the Republic of Cuba as an integral member of the Caribbean family; a day to express our solidarity with and best wishes for the People of Cuba; and a day for CARICOM and Cuba to reflect on ways to maintain our support for each other.

As we celebrate thirty-nine years of our friendship, and are about to commence our Fourth CARICOM-Cuba Summit, it is my sincere wish that we will have focused dialogue on the areas identified for discussion, resulting in the adoption of strategies that can only further enhance an already rich partnership.

I am therefore convinced that today's Summit will serve to strengthen our commitment to friendship and fraternity in the years ahead!

Thank You.