

**Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign
Trade, Commerce and Information Technology- Mr. Nathaniel
Williams
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**

VII Italy- Latin America Caribbean Conference

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the sub-regional grouping of the Caribbean Community states more generally of which St. Vincent is a part, I wish to thank the Government of Italy for the invitation to attend the 7th bi-annual edition of this notable event.

I have been tasked with communicating the sincere regret of the Honourable Senator Camillo Gonsalves, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, Commerce and Information Technology, who unfortunately could not attend at this time due to previous commitments. The Minister nevertheless conveys his genuine wish that the process of mutual learning and cooperation being advanced at this event would serve as a gateway to deepened development and ongoing partnership between Italy with the Caribbean region as well as with our Latin American neighbours.

In keeping with the limited time allotted, I will seek to address two subjects that speak particularly to where my Government's agenda and Italy's progressive interest in the region intersect.

The partnership between CARICOM and the European Union (EU) has been an extensive and fruitful one on many fronts. In latter times efforts have been made, particularly by Italy, to be a responsive and sympathetic partner in the areas of agriculture and natural disaster prevention and management. Both of these areas are high priority concerns for Small Island Developing States within the context of a world coping with climate change. For this reason, although these goodwill advances have been appreciated, the Caribbean really needs invested, strategic partners to help address the social, economic and other development issues of common interest in the region.

The FAO project promoting food security, launched in 2003 in the region, was potentially an important step in addressing an issue of ever increasing urgency. It illustrated the unique challenges faced by our states, in addressing food security, conserving bio-diversity and increasing local agro-production for example. The follow through on this project may not have been as successful as it could be

because a more cohesive approach may have been essential for successful socio-economic transformation. Persistent research and development activities are vital to effect real change in addressing these challenges and build capacity to foster a more efficient and competitive Agricultural sector in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

New advances, channeled through the operations of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center (CCC) to better incorporate ICT development and include the private sector can facilitate a more inclusive and sustainable approach. Moving forward we aim to truly capitalise on these cooperation engagements that have been made with various agencies to enhance practical outcomes in both agriculture and natural disaster prevention and management through the use of Information Technology.

We have also entered into an 'Agreement on Cooperation in Hydro-Meteorological Monitoring, Natural Disaster and Early Warning' with Italy. More can be done however to assist in enhancing the ability of countries like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to adequately respond early to natural disasters. This is imperative considering the rise in the number of devastating natural events that have wrought havoc on our islands over the last decade. These events have also undoubtedly had a severely damaging effect on the agriculture sector. The ability therefore to prepare for and weather disruptive incidents of this nature is important and requires not only progress in the capability of the states to improve disaster-monitoring systems but also infrastructural advances that accommodate protective elements.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has chosen to adopt a forward thinking, comprehensive approach to addressing these inter-connected issues. The time is late to address some of these pressing issues. Although it is not a traditional partner like the Latin American countries, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is cognizant of its critical voice in contributing to the balancing of the scales in the global environment. Italy, in pursuing a recent slate of MOU's with the Caribbean Community, shows an appreciation and recognition of the contribution to be made by these States. These initiatives however, though no doubt an important step in framing the work to be done, must yield increased practical action that addresses the long term concerns and unique socio-economic circumstances of our States in order to reap real dividends on the interest Italy has shown in these priority area.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion the attendance at this forum inspires in me a wish that a more ambitiously focused Italy will see the wisdom of the inclusion of a

wider cross-section of representation in considering and more effectively addressing the challenges of our day.