

Statement by His Excellency Brigadier John Sandy (Ret.), Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations, Geneva

to the VII Italy-Latin America and the Caribbean Conference

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Distinguished Heads of Government and State, Presidents and Secretaries General of Latin American and Caribbean Organisations, Ambassadors, Heads of Delegations, Members of the Business Community, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

A very pleasant morning to all:

I bring you greetings from the Honourable Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Winston Dookeran. Regrettably the Minister is unable to attend this very important conference at this time. However, he wished to convey the high importance placed on Trinidad and Tobago's relations with its European partners, and in particular, with Italy.

We believe that this conference provides an excellent platform, to strengthen our relations with Italy and with our Latin American counterparts. It also provides us with an opportunity to increase the profile of the Caribbean region, which shares a long and rich history with Europe. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, is therefore appreciative of this initiative by the Government of Italy, and commends its vision and continued interest, in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is also very appreciative of the support given by Italy and the member States of the European Union, to the Schengen Visa Waiver Agreement, which was signed on May 28, 2015 and which included the countries of Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). I must also mention that Italy was one of the first countries to signal its early support for Trinidad and Tobago's bid to have the visa waived, and today we can enjoy the fruits of our labour in that respect.

I wish to underscore the importance of visa free travel, for the traditionally dynamic relationship between the Caribbean and the European Union. This agreement builds on other initiatives such as the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the Joint Caribbean-EU Partnership Strategy, all of which enhance bi-regional partnership at various levels.

Trinidad and Tobago and Italy have had a long history of cooperation in areas such as energy and tourism, and we wish to further build upon that relationship. Trinidad and Tobago supported Italy's bid to host the 2015 International Expo and I embrace this opportunity to congratulate the Italian government, on hosting a successful expo thus far.

At the last Italy-Latin America and the Caribbean Conference, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago stressed the importance of an appropriate mechanism for co-operation between Latin America, Italy and the Caribbean, such that the Caribbean can engage more actively in

the process. He also urged the meeting to pursue avenues for greater co-operation with the Caribbean, emphasizing the vulnerability of the region to economic, external shocks.

The government of Trinidad and Tobago therefore places strategic importance, on the need to develop an appropriate axis for cooperation, between Latin America, Europe and the Caribbean, such that the Caribbean does not remain a mere appendage, but is actively engaged diplomatically.

Cooperation in the sphere of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the context of their contribution to economic growth, the promotion of new technologies and sustainable development, is an area in which we note that Italy has developed a wealth of experience. In the circumstances my delegation is happy to acknowledge the strengthening of the participation of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in the Italy-Latin America and the Caribbean Conference.

In the realm of culture, Latin America and the Caribbean have much to share with our Italian friends. Our Trinidad and Tobago carnival, our infectious calypso, steelband, reggae and samba from the Caribbean and Latin America represent vibrant means of sharing our culture. My colleagues and I would love to attend a Trinidad and Tobago styled carnival in Milan.

Chairman, Trinidad and Tobago remains eager and willing to pursue trade and investment initiatives with Italy in the areas of tourism, culture and other services, within the framework of the CARIFORUM-EU EPA. Of particular interest is the opening up of new markets for Caribbean companies and professionals to offer services in the EU in sectors such as business, communications, tourism, financial services, distribution, transport and recreational services.

It is noted that Italian investment in Trinidad and Tobago has resulted primarily in the establishment of small hotels, restaurants and other service-oriented business. We encourage Italy to strengthen its ties with CARICOM, as we hasten to commend you for your support given to the region as a non-borrowing member of the Caribbean Development Bank, an important institution contributing to achieving the development goals of CARICOM Member States.

One major step that the government of Italy can make towards ensuring greater engagement with the Caribbean region, is to consider support for Trinidad and Tobago's bid to host the Secretariat of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Trinidad and Tobago was among the States which championed the adoption of a strong, robust and effective ATT during the negotiations. The ATT was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on April 2, 2013, in an effort to regulate the international trade in conventional arms. If the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean wish to promote peace in the region, there must be a focus on arms control, which is a simple way to build trust and confidence between nations.

The ATT has sparked hope for transparency in the regional and global arms trade. Many states in the region have already ratified the Agreement and we hope that those that have not yet done so, will do so. Thus far, 69 countries have ratified the ATT. I wish to emphasize that several CARICOM and Latin American countries have ratified the Treaty.

The decision to adopt the ATT by the United Nations General Assembly was as a result of strong regional commitment and regional leadership. However, the work involved in realizing concrete benefits for the Latin American and Caribbean regions from the Treaty, is only now beginning.

At the 2011 Ibero-American Summit held in Paraguay, public security emerged as a primary concern in a region struggling with high rates of violence and criminality, fuelled by the illicit small arms trade. Firearms are behind rising murder rates in Latin America and the Caribbean where almost 75% of the homicides are committed with guns, compared to 21% in Europe. Indeed small arms and light weapons are the weapons of mass destruction for our region.

Trinidad and Tobago's impetus to host the Secretariat for the ATT is grounded in a strong commitment to protecting and improving the lives of the citizens of Latin America and the Caribbean, and as a candidate to host the ATT Secretariat, is supported by regional groupings such as CARICOM, the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

Regrettably, the geographical distribution of the location of international organizations is today far from equitable and, undesirably, the cardinal principle is honoured more in breach than observance. Placing the ATT Secretariat in Trinidad and Tobago would assist in some small measure in redressing the current gross imbalance.

Without prejudice to the privilege and immunities, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will make provisions to facilitate the early establishment and efficient operation of the Secretariat, making available the necessary physical facilities, including appropriate headquarters premises, and establish the requisite operating conditions, for the efficient operation of the Organisation.

International flights connect Trinidad and Tobago, either directly or through third cities, with major gateways in Europe and the Americas, thus making it possible and easy for representatives of States Parties from all regions to attend meetings at the Secretariat. With respect to geography, Trinidad and Tobago is located midway between North and South America and across the Atlantic Ocean from West and South West Africa and Europe. Of the three (3) candidate cities it is arguable that a Headquarters located in Port of Spain would involve the least time spent in travel for the largest number of representatives of States Parties. Port of Spain with a comparatively lower cost of living, in an industrialized setting, is within quick and easy reach of all UN delegations in New York.

It is our view, and one that is shared by the organisations in Latin America and the Caribbean, that the location of such a Secretariat in our region, will certainly bring to the fore, the situations of countries that are caught in the midst of the struggle against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

We therefore most respectfully urge those delegations present here, to give favourable consideration to the ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty, as well as to Trinidad and Tobago's bid to host the Secretariat.

Finally, I wish once more, to commend the Government of the Italian Republic, on its continued efforts to strengthen its relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. As the region continues to pursue its development objectives in the midst of global challenges, we find some comfort in knowing that our partnership with Europe is still strong.

Several references were made yesterday by our Italian colleagues with respect to sentiments expressed by His Holiness Pope Francis, himself a son of the Latin America and Caribbean region, in support of the Expo, and as such, we are guaranteed that divine intervention will attend, as together we pursue our most noble aspirations of cooperation.

Accordingly, together with our Latin American and CARICOM colleagues, Trinidad and Tobago remains eager to enhance relations and cooperation with Italy, all being pursued for a common vision.

I thank you.