

# Special Meeting of the CARIFORUM Council of Ministers, March 26-27, 2018: Opening Address by the Honorable Mark Brantley, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Aviation, Saint Kitts and Nevis

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Colleague Ministers, Distinguished Delegates,

It is a distinct honour and privilege for me to deliver these brief opening remarks at this Special Meeting of the CARIFORUM Council of Ministers. I am equally pleased to welcome you to the fair shores of our twin-island paradise, St. Kitts and Nevis, during our busy tenure as chair of CARIFORUM. We assure you that we will exert every effort to ensure that we have a productive meeting, and that you have a most pleasant experience in St. Kitts and Nevis.

We can all agree that we serve at a time when the tectonic plates on which our engagement with the European Union rest, continue to shift. It is a time which requires us *simultaneously* to:

1. Grapple with implementation of the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA),
1. Assess the impact of the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union (BREXIT), in an effort to mitigate against it,
1. Ensure the roll-over of the EPA into a CARIFORUM-UK Free Trade Agreement, preserve the level of market access into the UK market as obtains under the CARIFORUM-EU EPA; and
1. Consider our options for future engagement with the EU, Africa and the Pacific in the Post-Cotonou era.

I humbly submit, that each of these components demands that we remain focused and strategic in our approach to engagement with key partners both in our region and in Europe.

I am pleased to acknowledge the presence of various representatives from CARIFORUM Member States who are based in the United Kingdom and in Brussels, where much of the diplomatic activity is currently taking place at this critical point in time. Your work at both the technical and consultative level has helped to clarify much of the issues which emerged since the decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union close to two years ago, and inform the shape and contours of our future engagement.

We would wish to record our gratitude to the hard working staff at the CARIFORUM Directorate and the Office for Trade Negotiations (OTN) at the CARICOM Secretariat in Guyana for their technical output, which has brought us to our current state of readiness, to continue our dialogue with the United Kingdom and the other Member States of the European Union. We recognise your work in collaboration with CARIFORUM Member States to prepare textual proposals which will be submitted to the United Kingdom, as we seek to preserve our current level of market access into the United Kingdom after 2019.

I recognise and welcome His Excellency Patrick Gomes, Secretary General of the ACP Secretariat in Brussels, who can offer his perspective on developments in that theatre and on the future of the ACP and the Secretariat, even as we negotiate on a successor Agreement.

As we consider the way forward, we must find an effective way to establish a solid platform for discussing development cooperation. We are of the view that development cooperation in the form of technical assistance, capacity building, and financial mechanisms to enable our region to capitalise on the market access opportunities resulting from free trade agreements are meritorious. We reiterate that for us, however, development cooperation is cross-cutting; spanning the gamut of issues covered under the rubric of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. These universally accepted principles require our undivided attention, and partnership with the European Union is worthy of our attention and focus.

I am confident that this Special Meeting of the CARIFORUM Council of Ministers will serve to advance our work in the aforementioned thematic areas. In the final analysis, our role is to ensure that we create an enabling environment for the achievement of economic growth, social cohesion and environmental sustainability as embodied in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We have a rich legacy of cooperation between the African Caribbean and Pacific Group of countries and the European Union. May the decisions we take at this meeting, set us, and the generations to follow, on a firm footing that will redound to the sustainable growth of our regions, countries and all our peoples in the year 2020 and beyond.

I thank you!

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