

Speech delivered by
Major General (Retired) the Honourable Edmund Dillon
Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs
on the occasion of the National Day of the Dominican Republic
Tuesday 27th February, 2018

It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to extend, on behalf of the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago, and on my own behalf, heartfelt greetings to the Government and people of the Dominican Republic on the occasion of the 174th Anniversary of the Independence of the Dominican Republic.

This year's National Day celebration coincides with the golden anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Trinidad and Tobago and the Dominican Republic. Our bilateral relationship was strengthened further by the opening of the Embassy of the Dominican Republic in Port of Spain, and over the years, the warm and amiable relations between our countries have flourished to the mutual benefit of the people of both countries. Indeed, much has been achieved in our bilateral relationship.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

In the area of trade, Trinidad and Tobago and the Dominican Republic share a dynamic relationship with transactions involving a substantial list of import and export items. Moreover, bilateral trade has been boosted by the conduct of Trinidad and Tobago Trade Missions to the Dominican Republic, the most recent being one which took place over the period 12th to 16th September, 2017. Importantly, that Mission included Government officials and a number of private sector representatives and provided another platform from which our countries could increase commercial linkages. Its specific objectives included, the exploration of business opportunities, promotion of ties between trade and economic organizations, establishment of strategic business and logistical contacts as well as the sourcing of possible raw material for local manufacturers.

Trinidad and Tobago has also been pleased to welcome the Dominican Republic's business sector during the annual Trade and Investment Convention (TIC) and Caribbean Investment Forum (CIF). We look forward to increased participation by Dominican officials, business-persons and companies at this year's Convention and Forum.

Notably, trade between Trinidad and Tobago and the Dominican Republic is governed by the CARICOM-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement which was signed in 1998. Through passage of the CARICOM-Dominican Republic Free Trade Act of 2001, Trinidad and Tobago gave effect to the Agreement. For Trinidad and Tobago, the Free Trade Agreement is of critical importance because it provides an ideal framework for trade expansion and economic diversification. Additionally, CARICOM and the Dominican Republic are pursuing negotiations for additional preferential access into each other's market. It goes without saying that Trinidad and Tobago looks forward to the successful completion of these negotiations given the likelihood that enhanced market access will result in increased trade between our two countries.

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By dint of planning and strategic positioning, the Dominican Republic has earned an excellent reputation in the tourism sector. It is an exceedingly popular tourist destination in the Caribbean and the tourism sector generates significant revenue. We have also noted comments of His Excellency Danilo Medina Sanchez, President of the Dominican Republic, which he made at the United Nations Gala Dinner and Tourism Icon Awards in Jamaica in November 2017. He stated that the Caribbean stands to benefit greatly from the

marketing of the region as a unified destination in the global tourism market. Importantly, President Medina also called on States in the region to view the tourism sector as not only an engine of growth, but a motor for sustainable growth.

Like several of our neighbours, the Dominican Republic suffered devastation during the 2017 Hurricane Season. We in Trinidad and Tobago commiserate with those who suffered property loss or damage and, more than that, express regret at the destruction of infrastructure which was essential to your development initiatives.

In spite of the difficult circumstances that ensued in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, I am certain that the citizens of the Dominican Republic drew collective strength from the support from across the region and beyond. Furthermore, in the face of the region's vulnerabilities to natural disasters and the difficulties faced in recovery efforts after such disasters, Trinidad and Tobago stands in full support of current efforts being made in regional and international fora to highlight the threat that climate change poses to the region as well as the need to strengthen and enhance our countries' resilience.

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Our countries' membership of regional organisations such as the Association of Caribbean States, as well as processes inherent in our bilateral relationship, have allowed our respective Governments and peoples to explore our diverse landscapes, commercial exchange, culture and other spheres of cooperation. We have discovered in each other, a strong Caribbean spirit which is testimony to the sense of togetherness that we share in the region. This spirit also lends itself to our work in solidarity with each other to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves for the future development of our respective peoples.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I now invite you to join me in a toast towards the continued progress and prosperity of the Dominican Republic and to the enhancement of the strong ties between the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Dominican Republic.

I thank you.