8th ACS International Cooperation Conference Highlights Digital Transformation and Environmental Conservation in the Greater Caribbean

The 8th ACS International Cooperation Conference, held in Paramaribo, Suriname, on 7 May 2024, brought together regional and international experts, policymakers, stakeholders and development partners to explore pressing issues and opportunities facing the region. Under the theme “Propelling the Greater Caribbean through Pathways for Sustainable Development”, the conference facilitated discussions on key topics including digital transformation, environmental conservation, trade, and tourism, and underscored the importance of embracing innovative solutions to address the challenges of an evolving global landscape.

Welcome remarks were delivered by the Chair of the ACS Ministerial Council, H.E. Albert Ramdin who stressed the crucial role of transportation networks in facilitating commerce, tourism, and disaster recovery, and called for inventive approaches to enhance physical connectivity. Sustainable practices in tourism and the preservation of mangrove ecosystems to address environmental challenges such as climate change and the Sargassum influx were highlighted by the Minister. He pointed out the potential of turning seaweed from a threat into a valuable resource for various industries. He also stressed the importance of digitalization in improving business efficiency. A call for robust cooperation and concrete actions to improve the livelihoods of people in the Caribbean was made.

The Secretary General of the ACS, Rodolfo Sabonge delivered opening remarks and highlighted the profound impact of climate change on the region, emphasizing the necessity for international cooperation to address global challenges. He reflected on the advancements in sustainable development achieved during his tenure, underscoring the ACS' commitment to innovation and integration for the betterment of the Caribbean. He pointed out the diverse portfolio of projects presented at the eighth International Cooperation Conference, which showcase the region's dedication to sustainable and equitable development. He reaffirmed the ACS's role as a pivotal force in pioneering sustainable solutions for the Caribbean, aligning with the aspirations of its people for a dignified and balanced development.

The Director of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship of the Republic of Costa Rica, H.E. Carolina Molina-Barrantes, expressed gratitude to the host government for its hospitality and excellent event organization during her opening remarks. She highlighted the diverse cultural and architectural significance of Paramaribo, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Representing the Special Committee for Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation, she posited the importance of international cooperation to address shared regional and global challenges such as environmental conservation, climate crisis, disaster risk mitigation, support for commerce and small businesses, and the promotion of sustainable tourism. The Ambassador extended an invitation to forge strategic alliances that cater to the priorities set by the Council of Ministers, with a special focus on advocating for middle-income countries within the Caribbean to continue receiving tailored international support despite their income levels.

The Secretary General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States (GCC) of the Gulf, Jasem Mohamed AlBudaiwi, also took the floor at the conference to affirm the GCC's commitment to collaborative work with the Association of Caribbean States, highlighting joint efforts to promote economic growth through innovation and responsible resource management. He pointed out the investment opportunities and development potential shared by both regions, focusing on establishing an effective economic bloc on the regional and international stages. He reiterated the GCC’s readiness to advance these goals through pragmatic action plans and constructive political will, reflecting a genuine spirit of cooperation and a promising future for both communities.

The conference was focused on several critical issues, including the urgent need for digital transformation in the transport sector to enhance efficiency, safety, and sustainability. Discussions also covered the pivotal role of digital technology in empowering Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs), enabling them to compete better and integrate into global value chains.

The designation of the Caribbean Sea as a Special Zone for sustainable development was also a key consideration with participants identifying innovative solutions to the Sargassum crisis and promoting niche tourism to promote the region’s unique cultural and natural attractions as priorities for the Region.

Additionally, the launch of the 3rd Edition of the ACS South-South Cooperation Catalogue highlighted successful regional cooperation projects and serves as a resource for fostering collaboration and sharing best practices among Caribbean states.

The 8th ACS International Cooperation Conference reaffirmed the Association’s role as a catalyst for regional cooperation and integration, providing a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and partnership amongst its members and interested parties.