

The Association of Caribbean States Welcomes H.E. Noemí Espinoza Madrid as Eighth Secretary-General



The Association of Caribbean States (ACS) marked a historic milestone on December 19, 2024, as H.E. Rodolfo Sabonge officially handed over the mantle of leadership to H.E. Noemí Espinoza Madrid, the incoming Secretary-General. This ceremonial transition represents a new chapter for the ACS under Espinoza Madrid's stewardship.

"This trust honors me and deepens my commitment to work tirelessly to ensure that dialogue and cooperation reduce inequalities, place people and their dignity at the heart of development, promote climate justice, strengthen our partnerships, and advance the essential priorities of this vibrant Caribbean region," said H.E. Noemí Espinoza Madrid.

This ceremonial transition, attended in person and virtually by high-ranking officials from the 25 Member States and Associate Members of the ACS, along with ACS Observers and Social Actors, took place at the ACS Secretariat in Trinidad and Tobago. This significant event heralded a new era for the organization as it continues to advance its mission of uniting the Greater Caribbean through regional cooperation and sustainable development.

Dignitaries and representatives from across the region convened for the occasion, highlighting the significance of upholding the proud tradition of orderly transitions, representative governance, and visionary leadership that has defined the Greater Caribbean consultation, cooperation, and concerted action over the past 30 years.

H.E. Espinoza Madrid brings nearly three decades of distinguished leadership in multilateral diplomacy, global partnership-building, and high-level negotiations, guided by a commitment to sustainable development and human rights. Her visionary expertise will be instrumental in redefining the ACS's strategic direction, empowering the organization to foster transformative regional cooperation and advance sustainable development in response to current regional and

global challenges. "The Greater Caribbean, as a vital source of life for the world, faces immense shared challenges—climate change, inequality, resilience, and sustainable development. Tackling these demands requires collective action and deep respect for our planet and its people. Under my leadership, the Association of Caribbean States will transform good intentions into concrete actions, driven by innovation and cooperation, reclaiming its historic role as a leading force for hope and equality in the region," said H.E. Noemí Espinoza Madrid.

Incoming Secretary-General H.E. Noemí Espinoza Madrid emphasized the pivotal role of the ACS in addressing regional challenges: "Our focus will be on strengthening the ACS as a key institution for mobilizing strategic alliances, supporting cohesive policies, and coordinating impactful actions to protect the environment and foster economic, social, and cultural development. Guided by the mandates of our Member States, we are committed to advancing a sustainable, inclusive, and united Greater Caribbean.

"During his speech, the outgoing Secretary-General H.E. Rodolfo Sabonge, referring to the origins of the ACS: "Back then, our founders envisioned the Caribbean Sea as a space for economic activities such as trade, tourism, and transportation, with special attention to the protection and conservation of the Caribbean Sea and disaster risk reduction. These priorities remain as relevant today for the Greater Caribbean region. Today, we speak of the blue, circular, and orange economies, which are simply new terms for what our founders identified as focal areas for the ACS."

Outgoing Secretary-General Sabonge, reflecting on his tenure, highlighted the need to unify efforts to address uncertainty: "The current reality calls for revisiting and updating the foundations of the Association so that we not only unify efforts with our membership but also explore the role that this Association should play within the Latin America and Caribbean bloc." He also expressed gratitude for the opportunity to lead the ACS and emphasized his optimism for the organization's future under the capable leadership of H.E. Espinoza Madrid.

Among the distinguished attendees of the Handover Ceremony were the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, Kandya Obezo; the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Honduras, Gerardo Torres Zelaya; the Director of Regional Coordination and Integration Mechanisms of the Republic of Colombia, H.E. Margarita Eliana Manjarrez Herrera, in her capacity as Chairperson of the ACS Ministerial Council; the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Senator the Honourable Dr. Amery Browne; and the Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye to Trinidad and Tobago and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, H.E. Bengü Yiğitgüden.

During his remarks, the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Senator the Honourable Dr. Amery Browne, highlighted the contributions of outgoing Secretary-General Sabonge. "You have given us a Secretariat that is restructured and more fit for purpose than the one you met, and an ACS that has an elevated profile, well poised to tackle challenges ahead and take advantage of opportunities that will arise," he noted.

The Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye to Trinidad and Tobago and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, H.E. Bengü Yiğitgüden, praised Secretary-General Sabonge's tenure: "Today we celebrate the outstanding tenure of His Excellency Sabonge, who is leaving his mark on the collective mission of

the ACS. You, dear Mr. Sabonge, brought diverse voices together, strengthened international cooperation, and navigated the Association through both challenges and opportunities."

During the ceremony, the Vice Minister of Multilateral Affairs of Colombia, Kandya Obezo, also delivered remarks, stating that this ceremony symbolizes the continuity and strengthening of regional unity, embodying the diversity, shared history, and common future of its peoples. The Vice Minister also announced that the 10th ACS Summit of Heads of State and Government will be held on May 30, 2025, along with the ACS International Cooperation Conference on May 27 and the Ministerial Meeting on May 29, 2025, in Cartagena de Indias.

With H.E. Espinoza Madrid at the helm, the organization gains a dynamic leader whose extensive experience in diplomacy, sustainable development, and multilateral engagement promises to infuse the organization with fresh energy and strategic vision. Her leadership is set to drive innovative initiatives, strengthen regional partnerships, and elevate the ACS's role in fostering a more cohesive, sustainable, and equitable Greater Caribbean.