

[Key Remarks by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Havana International Conference Center, December 8, 2002 \[1\]](#)

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Honorable Heads of State or Government of Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the four Caribbean countries that, having achieved independence in 1972, 30 years ago, took the courageous step of establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba;

Honorable Heads of State or Government of the other member countries of CARICOM, whom we are bound to by close and excellent ties of brotherhood, solidarity and cooperation in various fields that constitute an example of relations between small developing countries;

Distinguished heads of delegations, ministers and special guests:

On a day like today, exactly 30 years ago, four small countries of the English-speaking Caribbean, having recently achieved their long desired independence, decided to establish diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Prior to this, from the very dawn of the Cuban Revolution, they had shown their sympathy and respect for the process we were undertaking. As early as January 1959, the local government of what was still the British colony of Guyana, led by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, leader of the People's Progressive Party, had declared its solidarity with the Cuban Revolution.

In the second half of 1972, Guyana hosted a meeting of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Comrade Raul Roa, Foreign Minister of Dignity, headed the Cuban delegation. Guyana's foreign minister at the time was Sir Shridath Ramphall, whom we have invited to this meeting for the role he played and continues to play in support of regional integration, particularly the integration of Cuba not only to the Caribbean, but also to the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of Nations (ACP). That meeting served as a prelude to the decision made by the Prime Ministers of Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago to establish relations with Cuba.

In deciding to establish diplomatic relations with Cuba, the leaders of those countries, considered the founding fathers of both the independence of their nations and of Caribbean integration –Errol Barrow of Barbados, Forbes Burnham of Guyana, Michael Manley of Jamaica, and Eric Williams of Trinidad and Tobago– realized that they were charting the course for what would later become the foreign policy of the Caribbean Community, characterized until today by three main features: independence, courage and concerted action.

Diplomatic relations were officially established on December 8, 1972, in ceremonies held simultaneously at the Jamaican Mission to the United Nations and the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa. Subsequently, as they achieved their independence and joined the Caribbean family, the other CARICOM countries established

full diplomatic relations with Cuba as well.

This unquestionably brave political decision, adopted by small and newly independent countries in a climate of hostility and enormous pressures, was a fundamental step toward breaking the diplomatic and trade blockade on Cuba in the region, and a breach in the isolation imposed on Cuba through the OAS. Our country will never forget this noble gesture on the part of its Caribbean brothers.

We Caribbean countries face the challenge of surviving and advancing in the midst of the most profound economic, social and political crisis ever sustained by our hemisphere and the world, as neoliberal globalization threatens to destroy not only our right to development, but also our cultural diversity and national identities. It is only through integration and cooperation, not only among states but also among the various regional organizations and entities, that our peoples can find a way out of this predicament.

This is crucial to counteract the adverse effects of an unfair and discriminatory international system, which inflicts particular suffering on our small and vulnerable countries. This is why we have so enthusiastically supported the Association of Caribbean States from its very inception and are working for the materialization of a Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement between CARICOM and Cuba.

Our country supports, and always will, the right of small and vulnerable countries to receive special and differential treatment in their access to trade and investment; to receive additional financial resources, on concessionary terms; and to have free access to clean and efficient technologies, under suitable conditions.

Cuba will always oppose the plundering of Caribbean professionals, doctors, nurses and teachers by the wealthy nations and reject the unbridled, ostentatious consumerism of a small group of wealthy countries, which poison the seas and the air thus posing a serious threat to life in our small island states.

The issue we propose to address involves the main threats faced by the region and the strong and concerted action required to tackle them.

We reaffirm our resolute and unwavering commitment to cooperating with our Caribbean brothers. Our country is willing to share with them its modest achievements.

Between 1961 and 2002, a total of 1085 students from the 14 countries of the Caribbean Community have completed studies in Cuba in 33 different areas of specialization, including 818 in higher education, and this number should and will continue to grow year after year. Today, in fact, the doors of Cuba's higher education institutions are open to thousands of youths from the Caribbean, including roughly a thousand medical school students, all studying free of charge.

There are currently 1174 Cuban civilian workers providing their services in CARICOM countries. Of these, 964 work in the health care sector, with over two thirds of them donating their services as some of our sister nations would not have the necessary economic resources to pay for these vital professional services.

We are aware that under the leadership of CARICOM, the countries of the region have adopted the "Caribbean Initiative to Fight HIV/AIDS".

Cuba is prepared to support this initiative with all of the scientific knowledge and expertise acquired in its own fight against HIV/AIDS, in accordance with the priorities defined in the regional strategy to confront this fearsome and destructive plague.

Our country is prepared to contribute to this decisive and crucial effort with one thousand health care workers, whose wages would be covered by our government. These personnel could also contribute to the training of local specialists and technicians in the sector.

We are also offering to provide the professors and technicians required for the establishment --in a Caribbean country chosen by CARICOM-- of a technical training school in nursing and other areas of medical sciences at this level. Every year, up to 200 young people from all of the CARICOM countries could attend this school and be specially trained to provide services to HIV/AIDS patients.

We would also contribute, free of charge, no less than 30% of the total value of the diagnostic equipment and kits produced in our country for the establishment of SUMA laboratories, which facilitate wide-scale testing of the population. This is an easily operated technology, designed in Cuba and validated and used not only here but also in over 35 other countries.

Our cooperation would not only include installation and commissioning of the equipment but also technical assistance and the training of local personnel in the use of this technology. In the case of Haiti, considering its enormous poverty, its large population and the high rate of infection, Cuba would be prepared to share the costs with other donor countries by contributing up to 40% of the total value of the diagnostic equipment and kits.

For such a project, which would truly make a difference for the Caribbean peoples, it will be crucial to seek and obtain the support of international organizations and countries with greater possibilities, especially with regard to anti-retroviral drugs. Based on its experience and the major advances made in their production, use and efficacy, Cuba could contribute to reducing the costs of these drugs to a minimum and would do so at no profit whatsoever.

The Caribbean has fought with all its might for Cuba to be a member of the Cotonou Convention. The Caribbean headed up the efforts that led the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States to accept Cuba as an observer in the ACP Group in 1998, and as a member country as of 2000.

However, other elements beyond the wishes of Cuba and the Caribbean obliged our country to withdraw its application for membership, which Cuba had filed in March 2002, mindful first and foremost of the Caribbean interest.

The situation has partly changed. Certain humiliating conditions have been mildly tempered. Cuba, which has continued to receive repeated requests from the ACP Group, and from the Caribbean in particular, to apply for membership in the Cotonou Convention, and guided by its desire to even further strengthen its relations and join in the destiny of its brothers in the Caribbean and the ACP Group, would like to inform you, Heads of State and Government of the Caribbean, of its decision to submit its application for membership in the Association Agreement between the ACP States and the European Union, known as the Cotonou Convention.

Cuba will be forever grateful to its Caribbean brothers for their steadfast position of respect for and solidarity with our country. The most recent proof of this being the vote of the entire Caribbean Community, with one voice and without a single exception, at the United Nations General Assembly, against the unjust and ruthless blockade against our country lasting almost 44 years, an unheard of and fully unprecedented case in history.

Unity, dignity and rational and solidarity-based integration are the only possible means to confront the common challenges of the globalized, unequal and discriminatory world that threatens us all.

In the name of friendship and the historical, cultural, family and other ties that unite us, I thank you all, dear brothers, for the immense honor you have made us in accepting the invitation to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago and our own country, a beautiful gesture of solidarity unprecedented in our hemisphere. The sons of Cuba are and always will be entirely at your disposal, noble and selfless Caribbean compatriots.

Allow me to reaffirm, on behalf of our noble and heroic people, that the Caribbean will always be able to count on the eternal friendship, generosity and appreciation as well as the full support of its Cuban brothers.

Thank you very much.

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