

**Press release 29/2000**

(21 March 2000)

**CARICOM AND DOMINICAN REPUBLIC  
CONCLUDE FREE TRADE TALKS**

After three days of intensive negotiations earlier this month, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has concluded a comprehensive bilateral trade package with the Dominican Republic, paving the way for the early implementation of a Free Trade Agreement.

On concluding these final negotiations, Mr. Edwin Carrington, CARICOM Secretary-General, and Mr. Frederic Emam Zade, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs/Ambassador in Charge of Trade Negotiations, of the Dominican Republic, on 19 March, 2000 initialed a Protocol for the implementation of the CARICOM/Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement.

The Agreement was signed on 22 August, 1998 by President Leonel Fernandez of the Dominican Republic and the then Chairman of the Conference of CARICOM Heads of Government, Dr. the honourable Kenny Anthony, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia.

The Agreement and Protocol represent the most comprehensive bilateral trade agreement CARICOM has ever concluded.

The Protocol provides for duty-free trade for about ninety percent of the goods traded between the Dominican Republic and the More Developed Countries (MDCs) of CARICOM - Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

For those products not eligible for duty free treatment, the Protocol provides for phased reduction of duty for some by 2004, and the most favourable nation treatment for the remainder. The two Parties will meet at the political level to address the treatment to be accorded to aerated beverages in trade between them.

Though the exports from CARICOM Less Developed Countries (LDC), the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and Belize will enjoy the same treatment on entering the Dominican Republic market as the products of the MDCs, exports from the Dominican Republic to the CARICOM LDCs will continue to attract duties to 2005. This situation will be reviewed in 2004.

The Protocol also provides for a list of Selected Agricultural Products to be subjected to special trading arrangements - duty-free treatment except during special periods of glut, for which schedules will be established.

The Protocol also contains provisions for Trade in Services, Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investment, Government Procurement and Temporary Entry of Business Persons.

It is anticipated that the Protocol will be signed at the highest political level of the Contracting Parties and that it will enter into force within the shortest possible time.

In exchanges before the initialing of the Protocol, CARICOM Secretary-General and the leader of the Dominican Republic delegation remarked on the tough but cooperative spirit in which the negotiations had been conducted. They expressed warm appreciation for the contributions from both sides during the several negotiating sessions. Secretary-General Carrington was particularly appreciative of the advice rendered by Sir Alister McIntyre of the Regional Negotiating Machinery (RNM) in the final crucial stages of the negotiations.

\*\*\*\*\*