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Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade

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BARBADOS SEES VALUE IN CELAC–CHINA FORUM

Barbados is encouraged by the potential role of the CELAC-China Forum in promoting increased South-South cooperation between China and the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Senator Maxine McClean, stressed this recently, as she gave an account of what transpired at the historic First Ministerial Meeting of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) – China Forum, which she attended in Beijing from January 7 to 9.

“In fact, I would argue that this is indeed the operationalising of the concept that we often talk about – that is, South-South Cooperation. I think this is an excellent example of what South-South cooperation is intended to be,” declared Senator McClean.

Recalling what Chinese President, Xi Jinping, stated at the opening ceremony, Minister McClean noted that he had set the goal for bilateral trade between China and Latin America and the Caribbean countries at a target figure of US\$500 billion over the next 10 years.

“He has announced that in collaboration with regional financial institutions and in the case of Barbados and CARICOM, China will provide concessional financing for many of the projects developed within the framework of the CELAC-China mechanism,” the Minister revealed.

It was also pointed out that at the Ministerial Meeting, the Foreign Ministers had reviewed and adopted three documents to guide the countries as they embarked on their agreed cooperation initiatives. These documents were: Institutional Arrangements and Operating Rules of China-CELAC Forum; The Beijing Declaration of the First Ministerial Meeting of the CELAC–China Forum; and The CELAC-China Cooperation Plan (2015-2019).

Senator McClean stated that the proposed areas for cooperation covered in large part the region’s common interests, and, once implemented, would redound to the growth and development of Caribbean people.

Expressing pleasure that there was consensus on the need for differential treatment for Caribbean countries, she said: “Of course, as you know we are many small states comprising CARICOM with special and peculiar challenges, and therefore, my Caribbean colleagues and I are happy that among other issues climate change was given prominence in the Cooperation Plan. We are very vulnerable to the impact of climate change.”

The CELAC-China Forum is a bi-regional mechanism intended to foster collaboration in a wide range of areas including: training of human resources; transfer of technology; infrastructural development; climate change; energy, natural resources;

cultural exchanges; and a number of critical economic sectors, such as tourism; agriculture; and international financial cooperation.

The decision to develop this bi-regional mechanism was taken by the Heads of State and Governments of the region at the second CELAC Summit, which was held in Havana, Cuba, in January last year. Six months later, the CELAC-China Forum was officially launched in Brasilia in the margins of the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) Summit in July, 2014.

The CELAC-China Forum 2015 was held under the theme: **New Platform, New Starting Point, New Opportunity – Joint Efforts to Promote China-Latin America and the Caribbean Partnership of Comprehensive Cooperation.**
(JG/BGIS)