

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE November 17, 2003**

## **Press Release CRNM-PR 25/03**

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### **RNM Chief: FTAA Talks 'Amicable'**

**November 17, 2003**

MIAMI, UNITED STATES - "Deliberations, thus far, have been amicable and constructive". Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (RNM) Director-General, Ambassador Richard Bernal, made these remarks, November 17, two days into the Sixteenth meeting of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC), convened in Miami, United States.

The four-day TNC, that got underway November 15, is striving to broker 'balance' to respond to the sensitivities of the negotiating countries concerned.

Commenting on the over-all approach to the TNC, Ambassador Bernal characterized the mood as one where Delegations were cognizant of the importance of fostering 'flexibility'. "Every country has a 'wish list' that takes into consideration their respective level of ambition and preference for 'scope' of this Agreement. Yet, all concerned are willing to work toward consensus. *Flexibility* is key. This is clearly evident in the drafting of the Ministerial Declaration that has occupied most of the meeting", he said.

The Ministerial Declaration is set to be tabled for the consideration of hemispheric Trade Ministers, November 20 to 21. A draft Text, elements of which have been the subject of intense drafting, over the past two days, was presented to Delegates at the outset of the TNC by the meeting's Co-Chairs.

So far, Vice Ministers have considered the status of FTAA negotiations and the objectives of the Miami Ministerial Conference. Attention has been focused on a vision of the FTAA and the delicate balance therein. Deliberations have incorporated a review and subsequently approved a series of reports to be forwarded to Ministers, at Miami. These reports consider: the progress achieved in relation to the treatment of differences in the levels of development and size of economies in each of the Negotiating Groups; implementation of the Hemispheric Cooperation Programme (HCP); activities of the Committee of Government Representatives on the participation of Civil Society (SOC). The meeting is still considering an overview of the negotiations and fulfillment of the mandates issued to the Negotiating Groups.

Elements for evaluating candidate sites for the FTAA Secretariat and the process for selection have been under review. Recommendations to carry this issue forward have emerged from these deliberations.

The RNM chief, CARICOM's lead FTAA negotiator, has previously called for a 'pragmatic re-dimensioning' of the FTAA, based on a core of components which enjoy consensus and bearing in mind the current state of the negotiations, and the scheduled completion of negotiations, in December 2004.

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*For More Information Contact:*

**Nand C. Bardouille**

Tel: (246) 430-1678

email: [nand.bardouille@crnm.org](mailto:nand.bardouille@crnm.org)

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