



Remarks by Major General (Ret'd) The Honourable Minister Edmund Dillon

President XII CDMA

Opening Session (Plenary)

Ministers, Chiefs of Staff, Senior Defense and Civilian State representatives, representatives of Observer countries and organisations, our formal work is about to begin.

The Twelfth Conference of Defense Ministers of the Americas seeks to advance the progress made since we met in Arequipa, Peru.

In December 2014, the Pro Tempore Secretariat of the CDMA was handed over to the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GORTT) by the Government of Peru. Immediately thereafter, the GORTT initiated a process of engagement and dialogue with partners across the Hemisphere.

In preparing for the CDMA, the GORTT also sought to fulfil the mandates outlined in the Declaration of Arequipa. We canvassed the myriad problems with which we, as a Hemisphere, are faced and took cognisance of the changing international defence and security environment. We convened a number of meetings with the objective of intensifying this dialogue.

This engagement was participative in nature; we consulted with local stakeholders to consolidate views on the proposed thematic axes. We conducted two Ad Hoc Working Group Meetings to address, firstly, the Proposals of Alternatives for Coordination between the CDMA and Specialised Hemispheric Military Conferences and, secondly, the Cooperation in Regional Search and Rescue. In Washington D.C., we furthered the discourse and exchange of ideas and delivered an address to the Organisation of American States Committee on Hemispheric Security

and met with representatives of the Central American System of Integration (SICA), Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Latin American Integration Association (ALADI). The meeting of Experts in December 2015, was particularly useful for advancing the discussions which took place in Washington D.C. And this year in April at the Preparatory Meeting, we sought your approval of the Theme and the three Thematic Axes.

I am pleased to report that the dialogue has been particularly productive because of your cooperation. It is evident that, as a Hemisphere, we have acknowledged the evolution of the theatre of war and have sought to enhance the spirit of cooperation and collaboration to effectively respond to this new reality. We have sought, at each Conference, to more effectively confront traditional and non-traditional threats through the exchange of information and experiences on defence and security matters in accordance with Article 2 of the CDMA Regulations.

However, as we are all aware, some critics have bemoaned the failure of the CDMA process to proffer tangible outcomes. In cognisance of this criticism, the GORTT decided to revitalise our dialogue and seek to produce outcomes which deepen collaboration. We do recognise that this work has to be completed in tight timelines.

I would, as President, endeavour to foster an engaging and robust discussion on the matters which are before us. I anticipate therefore your support in advancing the CDMA process in acknowledgement of the Williamsburg Principles in order to strengthen the hemispheric defence and security architecture.