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**REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

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**Press release for Seventh Joint Meeting of Standing Committees Chiefs of Immigration and Comptrollers of Customs**

**Calls for collective action while Minister reveals link between murder rate and drugs at CARICOM Standing Committee Meeting in Suriname**

The Seventh Joint Meeting of the Caribbean Community's Standing Committees of Chiefs of Immigration and Comptrollers of Customs opened yesterday morning at the Krasnapolsky Hotel in Paramaribo with calls to strengthen collective action to address the main security threats facing the Region and some revealing statistics and commentary on the murder rate in the Region.

The Meeting had as its stated objectives the furtherance of measures designed to operationalize certain key strategic regional cooperation initiatives including; the Advanced Passenger Information System (APIS); and the Advanced Cargo Information System (ACIS); increased standardization of border security training; the Regional Watch List System; and last but not least CARICOM's new Travel Card called CARIPASS.

In her opening remarks, the Executive Director of CARICOM IMPACS reminded the audience that significant effort and considerable resources had already been invested in these initiatives. Ms. Lynne Anne Williams, exhorted the regional gathering to become champions of implementation for what was agreed when they returned to their respective member states. "Be mindful," she said, "each and every one of these projects has the capacity to impact seriously and positively on Regional Security".

Minister of Justice and Police, the Honourable Chandrikpersad Santokhi welcomed delegates on behalf of the Government and people of Suriname, promising active participation from his country in the CARIPASS core group, with a view to implementation. Before declaring the Meeting open, however, he tabled other issues of extreme concern for the Community. "40% of all murders in the world are committed in Latin America and the Caribbean, whilst this Region comprises only 8 - 10 % of the world's population...the average murder rate per 100,000 people for the world is 5, whilst for the Region it is 22."

Minister Santokhi went on quoting from a report published by the Inter-American Commission on Drugs (CICAD) last year which gave specific figures for murders in CARICOM member states (per 100.000 persons): Jamaica 61 murders, Trinidad 30, Bahamas 24, Antigua 20, Guyana 13, Dominica 9, Suriname 5, Barbados 4.

The Minister used these statistics to draw attention to what he referred to as the drugs threat, saying that “drugs have a significant impact on the multidimensionality of the security threat facing the Region” and that “most of these murders are drug related”.

After assuring all, that these issues were being seriously addressed, Minister Santokhi announced that Suriname will organize an international Training Seminar on Fraud and Document Recognition in 2009 which would focus on, among other things, the prevention of illegal immigration and illicit criminal activities by way of falsified travel documents.

In summary, both Minister Santokhi and the Executive Director of CARICOM IMPACS expressed the view that a commitment to collective action was paramount if the Region was to be successful in tackling crime and security issues. Ms. Williams also lamented the fact that traditional, unilateral, nation based approaches to crime and security management are proving unequal to the challenges of the new global security landscape.

The Meeting was co-chaired by the current Chair of the Standing Committee for Immigration, Superintendent Jessmon Prince of Grenada, and former Chair of the Standing Committee for Customs (2007 – 2008), Fitzroy John of Trinidad and Tobago.

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