Message by the Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Ambassador Irwin LaRocque

On the Occasion of
Caribbean American Heritage Month

Ten years ago the United States Congress passed the resolution proclaiming Caribbean American Heritage Month. That initiative heralded the culmination of committed advocacy by a dedicated group determined to highlight the contribution of Caribbean people to the American society. History will record the prominent role of the Institute of Caribbean Studies (ICS) and its Founder and President, Dr. Clare Nelson in that achievement.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) welcomed this recognition of the contribution by our citizens and Americans of Caribbean descent, to the growth and development of the United States. This began with the Nevisian Alexander Hamilton who was one of the Founding Fathers of the USA.

Member States of CARICOM have always enjoyed close relations with the United States which remains the Community's largest trading partner. These ties have been bolstered by periodic meetings at the highest levels, with the latest taking place in Jamaica as recently as last April with President Barack Obama.

The links have been made even stronger due to the large diaspora providing direct family relations between the Caribbean Community and the United States which ensure a vibrant two-way tourism market. According to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), that large diaspora remitted close to US$5 billion to CARICOM Member States in 2014, a significant social and economic contribution to the Region.

The Community is also highly appreciative of the efforts being made to further the interests of the Region by the Caribbean American groups who avidly lobby the lawmakers on Capitol Hill and in the various States and City governments. Indeed, the highlight of this year's celebration by the ICS, the National Caribbean American Legislative Week, is a demonstration of its continuing dedication to highlighting the interests of the Region and the issues which affect Caribbean Americans in their adopted homeland.

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As CARICOM goes through a reform process to become more resilient economically, environmentally, technologically and socially, the input of the diaspora is an important element in advancing that change. Whether it is through attempting to influence US lawmakers, investing in their homelands or lending their skills and expertise to the Region, Caribbean Community Americans can make a difference.

This observance of Heritage Month must always be a constant platform, both to recognise the contribution of Americans with roots in the Caribbean Community, to their adopted homeland and to reconfirm their commitment to the development of the Region from which they gained their heritage.