

**OPENING ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SURINAME, HIS EXCELLENCY RUNALDO RONALD VENETIAAN OF
THE 39TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE CARIBBEAN SHIPPING
ASSOCIATION ON MONDAY OCTOBER 12, 2009 – ROYAL TORARICA
HOTEL, PARAMARIBO – SURINAME**

- **Mr. Fernando Rivera, President of the Caribbean Shipping Association,**
- **Members of the General Council of the Association,**
- **Delegates from all over the Caribbean, the Americas, Europe and beyond,**
- **Staff members of the CSA,**
- **President and Members of the Suriname Shipping Association,**
- **Commissioners, Management and Staff of NV Havenbeheer Suriname,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I bid a warm welcome to all of you. I do this on behalf of the Government and People of my country the Republic of Suriname. It is indeed an honor for us to host the annual meeting of such a distinguished and important regional organization as the Caribbean Shipping Association.

I have been informed by the organizing committee that, notwithstanding your busy agenda, some time has been reserved to enjoy our city, our rich culture, our rich culinary and, if possible our nature.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some 8 years ago, on the 21 of May 2001, I was invited to officially open the bi-annual meeting of the CSA in this same hotel.

What a change the world has made between that day in May and today, the twelfth of October 2009. Among other things we have witnessed the 9/11 attacks. As one of the results of these attacks, we have been forced into the introduction and the implementation of the International Ships' and Port Facilities Security Code.

We experienced the need to upgrade our security systems and to adjust existing legislation and approve new laws.

Climate change is now higher on the agenda and eventually special provisions had to be taken to enhance the environment in our ports.

We all are aware of the sacrifices we had to make to invest in security, safety and environment to comply with international regulations such as ISPS Code and other IMO regulations.

It has not been that easy since May of 2001 to keep up with the rapid developments of information technology, but still we had to make the necessary investments to apply this technology in the maritime industry and in our ports.

We had little choice: In the past few years' maritime transport increased by more than 600%. As a consequence more and bigger ships had to be built and port facilities had to be adapted, extended or constructed.

Bigger ships and an increase cargo volume put pressure on port operators to invest heavily in handling equipment and in their organizations.

The steady growth of world trade up to two years ago forced every actor in the industry to increase capacity and improve efficiency and cost effectiveness.

In Suriname between May 2001 and October 2009 the volume of cargo handled at our main port facility more than tripled.

Acknowledging this situation, together with Maritime Authority Suriname and Havenbeheer Suriname (Suriname Ports' Management Company), our Government made the necessary investments in port infrastructure, institutional strengthening and training and education.

But most importantly through public sector – private sector partnership the private sector was fully involved in the new institutional organization of our main facility, the public wharf known as the Nieuwe Haven.

To upgrade, rehabilitate and extend the Nieuwe Haven Terminal some Euro 55 million and USD 30 million will have been invested when the works will be finished in 2012.

Private terminal operators invested in 2009 alone about USD 10 million in handling equipment.

We strongly believe that public and private sector partnership is important for the sustainable development of the maritime sector.

The public sector is responsible for the infrastructure while cargo handling is the responsibility of the private sector.

This approach is working for us in Suriname, which is very important for our country that depends for almost 100% on maritime transport for its imports and exports.

**Mr. President and Members of the General Council,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The financial crisis that started in the United States of America, crossed over to Europe and then spread all over the world, and had its direct effects in the economies of our region.

Economic growth stagnated, unemployment increased, revenues dropped, trade declined, sales dropped and travelling decreased.

One does not need to tell Caribbean People that there is a financial and economic crisis going on in the world and that it will take some time for the markets to fully recover.

Many of them feel it in their daily struggle of everyday's life.

Your conference theme is: Tomorrow begins Today.

Given on the one hand the challenging times, sometimes even difficult times our region is experiencing and at the other hand the promising perspectives for the future, solving today's problems will bring a better tomorrow.

The challenge is to handle today's problems in an effective way in order to lay the foundation for tomorrow.

Opportunities for tomorrow grow from the challenges of today.

At this very moment our National Assembly is discussing the Economic Partnership Agreement signed between the European Union and Cariforum. I trust that this agreement will have its impact on trade in general and by this on the maritime industry.

There are many opportunities for our region. Together we will be able to capitalize on them.

The fact that the maritime industry is of vital importance for the Caribbean puts a heavy responsibility on the Caribbean Shipping Association.

The Association is a very unique organization in the sense that ship-owners, port and terminal operators, shipping agents and stevedoring companies all are members and although it might look that their interest are not common, they all share one objective.

The various groups realize that they share a common reality that obliges them to jointly seek and find solutions for common problems and together aspire to increase capacity, maximize efficiency and reduce costs in a socially acceptable way.

Without any doubt the maritime industry can be considered a catalyst for economic development and growth.

Convinced that you are aware of this significant role, I call upon the CSA to more than ever join our Governments in our efforts to upgrade the level of prosperity and well-being of the Caribbean people.

The Government of Suriname closely follows the developments of the industry in our region and the contribution of the CSA.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Delegates,

My best wishes for a fruitful and successful conference and I am confident that the People of our region will benefit from the results of your work here in Paramaribo.

With these words it is my pleasure to open the 39th Annual General Meeting and Conference of the Caribbean Shipping Association.

I thank you for your attention.