

# ANTILLA

Depuis 1981

*Caribbean*

## A New Momentum for Regional Cooperation

**CCRAG XVII – 2024**

Conférence de  
Coopération  
Régionale  
Antilles  
Guyane

French West Indies – French Guiana  
Regional Cooperation Conference

**SPECIAL CARIBBEAN | ISSUE #1 | AUGUST 2024**



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**MARTINIQUE - FRANCE**

## Significant progress for Regional Cooperation

The 17th French West Indies - French Guiana Regional Cooperation Conference was held in Saint-Martin from April 23 to 26, 2024. The event brought together elected representatives, Prefects, French ambassadors in the region, and public and private stakeholders involved in regional cooperation.

Four working sessions were dedicated to geopolitics & regional integration, global security, exports and cultural & linguistic exchanges. Two side events were also organized, one on climate change and regional cooperation, the other aimed at facilitating meetings between ambassadors and entrepreneurs.

The conference opened with the speech of Louis Mussington, President of the Territorial Council of Saint-Martin, followed by speeches from Patrick Sellin and Sabrina Robin, representatives of the local authorities of Guadeloupe, then Gabriel Serville, President of Guyane, Serge Letchimy, President of Martinique, Xavier Lédée, President of Saint-Barthélemy and Marie Guévenoux, Minister Delegate for Overseas France.

On this occasion, a joint political declaration was adopted by the Minister Delegate and the presidents of the local authorities on a common strategy for the State and the French West Indies - French Guiana local authorities for external action in the Caribbean and the Guiana Shield.

Discussions and exchanges strengthened the links between regional players, helped to find common solutions to challenges, and led to the signing of agreements for enhanced and sustainable regional cooperation.

The closing ceremony of the CCRA, chaired by Vincent BERTON, Prefect of Saint-Barthélemy and Saint-Martin, was attended by Félix FERNANDEZ SHAW, representative of the European Union, Rodolfo SABONGE, Secretary General of the ACS, Armstrong ALEXIS, Deputy Secretary General of CARICOM, Didacus JULES, Director General of the OECS and Roland DUBERTRAND, Ambassador in charge of cooperation in the region. All stressed the importance of regional cooperation.

We hope that this special issue will give you a better understanding of the challenges and progress of regional cooperation in the Caribbean.



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Extension of our refrigerated container fleet to meet the requirements of specialized markets.
- **INSTALLATION OF PHOTOVOLTAIC SHADING SYSTEMS**  
Implementation of sustainable energy solutions to reduce our carbon footprint and move towards self-consumption.

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**SPEECH BY THE MINISTER DELEGATE FOR  
OVERSEAS FRANCE**



**SCAN TO WATCH  
MARIE GUÉVENOUX'S  
SPEECH**



## Toward a **Fresh Perspective** on Regional Cooperation in the Caribbean

At the 17th Regional Cooperation Conference of Caribbean countries, we had the honor of speaking with Mr. Serge Letchimy, President of the Territorial Collectivity of Martinique (CTM). This discussion provides a comprehensive insight into the president's ambitions and concerns regarding the future of Martinique and its role in the Caribbean.

**You mentioned the importance of political autonomy for Martinique. Could you elaborate on this point?**

Absolutely. One of our main challenges is the restrictions placed upon us in terms of signing international agreements. Currently, no local authority president, including myself, can sign such agreements without the authorization of the State. This places us in a position of infantilization, limiting our ability to act effectively and rapidly in response to regional challenges. Since the law of 2016, an opening has been made - for the moment insufficient in the absence of constitutional reform - which gives the possibility for the signature of international agreements.

We must also have the ability to adapt our laws and regulations without always seeking approval from mainland France, which is vital for our autonomous development.

How can we cooperate effectively if I can't sign any agreements? This creates a feeling of infantilization incompatible with real cooperation between equals.



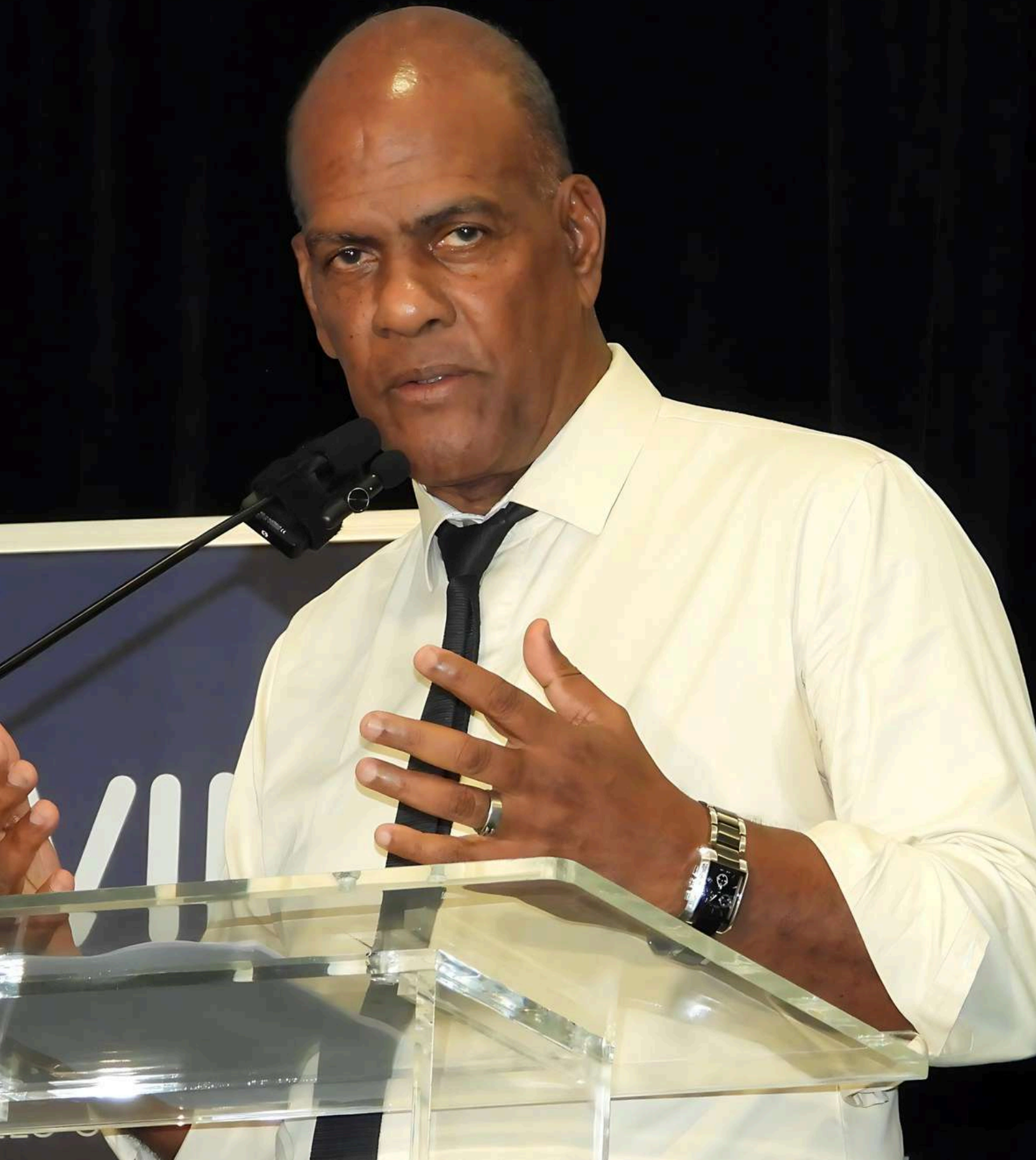
**You also talked about technology and innovation. What role do they play in your vision for Martinique?**

Technology and innovation are crucial for transcending our current economic model. We must consider a major transformation, particularly through the adoption of new technologies that can strengthen our infrastructure and logistics. This involves moving beyond traditional frameworks and fostering a development culture focused on local innovation, especially in agriculture and the digital economy, to better meet our specific needs.

MARTINIQUE'S AUTONOMY IS NOT AN END IN ITSELF, BUT A MEANS TO ANCHOR OUR ACTIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN REALITY, SO THAT EVERY DECISION MADE REFLECTS OUR LAND AND NOT THE DISTANT ECHO OF OTHER VOICES.



***Jurisdiction without normative power, meaning the inability to adjust laws and regulations at a local level, would leave regional authorities in a subordinate position, like children within regional bodies.***



***We need to be able to adapt our laws and regulations to better meet the realities of our territory, eliminating the need to travel vast distances for every decision.***

**What are the specific economic challenges in the Caribbean region that you aim to tackle?**

Our region suffers from a predatory economic system that leads to vast inequalities. Moreover, we encounter substantial logistical challenges due to our geographical location, which affects access to markets and resources.

It is crucial to revise our economic strategies to reduce our dependence on external aid and strengthen our economic autonomy, which will create a stable platform for our youth and our future.

We need to shift from the traditional approach of extensive importation centered on two monocultures. (...) transition from the triangular trade mindset to embrace a triangle of advancement that could position Martinique as the hub for significant technological innovation and logistics transformation.



**What message would you like to convey to the Government represented by the Minister Delegate?**

To the Minister, I would like to emphasize the pressing importance of acknowledging and honoring the autonomy and unique characteristics of Martinique within the context of the French Republic. We must revise the legal frameworks that regulate our actions, especially by advancing in signing international agreements, specifically in the areas of trade and the economy.

This is crucial for our development and to enhance our position in the Caribbean region.





- We advocate for increased flexibility in managing our operations, minimizing administrative burdens that hinder our ability to effectively address local and regional challenges.

- We need to be able to adapt our laws and regulations to better meet the realities of our territory, eliminating the need to travel vast distances for every decision.

- I endorse Emmanuel Macron's suggestion to confer genuine normative authority to overseas territories. Jurisdiction without normative power, meaning the inability to adjust laws and regulations at a local level, would keep us in a subordinate position, like children within regional bodies.

- It is crucial to distinguish the construction of public policies in a decentralized manner.

I urge the government to endorse our endeavors in innovating and advancing our economy sustainably. Martinique has the potential to exemplify sustainable and innovative development, but this requires the backing and tangible commitment of the central government to turn these ambitions into reality.

**You have suggested a conference on security.. What are the primary concerns you aim to tackle?**

Security is a broad topic that encompasses not only physical security due to violence and illicit trafficking, but also economic and food security.

The conference will aim to develop cooperation strategies among Caribbean countries to better address these threats. It is essential to collaborate on these fronts to ensure regional stability that will foster development and collective prosperity.

We will not build strong ecological resilience at local, national and European level without establishing a genuine policy of recognition, as defined by Edgar Morin. Otherwise, we will expose ourselves to precariousness.

The current predatory economic system creates too many inequalities and turns our territories into dangerous platforms for all kinds of trafficking that elude governmental control.

**What message would you like to convey to young people in Martinique and those in the diaspora?**

My message to the youth emphasizes the importance of dedication and accountability in our journey of change:

You represent the future of Martinique, and your engaged involvement is essential in shaping the society you want. We need your energy, your ideas, and above all, your willingness to work for a better future, here in Martinique or wherever you are in the world.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Minister Delegate responsible for overseas territories, President LETCHIMY, and the Presidents of the local authorities of Guadeloupe, Saint-Barthélemy, Saint-Martin, and French Guiana signed a collective political declaration regarding the external actions of the State and French Communities in the French West Indies - French Guiana region within the Caribbean basin and the Guiana plateau. This declaration is centered on four key priorities aimed at promoting regional integration.

1. Support and enhance cooperation in combating climate change, building resilience, and promoting biodiversity conservation.
2. Continue and enhance State efforts in combating drug, arms, and human trafficking.
3. Initiate an economic and cultural territorial diplomacy dynamic by fostering commercial exchanges, maritime and air interconnection, and showcasing the strengths of overseas economies, especially in services, expertise, engineering, and the digital sector.
4. Enhance cultural and human exchanges, especially focusing on youth, the French-speaking world, regional languages, and specifically Creole.

Moreover, communities will enhance their bilateral and regional collaboration through organizations like CARICOM, the OECS, and the AEC to advance peace, stability, and economic and social progress in the region amidst a concerning rise in violence and trafficking.



# Caribbean **Unity** and **Resilience**

At the recent 17th Caribbean Regional Heads of Government Meeting (CCRAG) in St. Martin, Dr. Armstrong Alexis, Deputy Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), provided a comprehensive overview of the regional bloc's challenges, initiatives, and vision for the future. In this in-depth interview, he candidly discusses topics ranging from regional cooperation hurdles to climate change adaptation and the accession of the French territories as associate members.

### **What is the Community's strategic vision?**

Our strategic vision is to have a Caribbean Community that is integrated, inclusive and resilient; driven by knowledge, excellence, innovation and productivity. A Community where every citizen is secure and has the opportunity to realize their potential with guaranteed human rights and social justice; contributing to and benefiting from the economic, social and cultural prosperity. A Community which is a unified and competitive force in the global arena.

### **What are the main challenges CARICOM is currently facing in terms of regional cooperation?**

Regional transport presents significant challenges in terms of both availability and cost. The closure of the regional airline LIAT has made it difficult to move people and goods around the Caribbean. Additionally, climate change and its impacts, such as sea-level rise and biodiversity loss, pose serious threats to our tourism-dependent economies. The « de-risking » of Caribbean banks by international financial institutions has further restricted our ability to conduct international financial transactions, thus hampering business operations. Moreover, our classification as middle-income countries by institutions like the World Bank limits our access to concessional lending.



### **What solutions is CARICOM considering to address these challenges?**

We are advocating for homegrown solutions like the Bridgetown Initiative, designed to secure development financing on terms beneficial to small island developing states. The proposed Multidimensional Vulnerability Index aims to quantify our vulnerabilities beyond GDP figures, potentially unlocking further assistance. Establishing a loss and damage fund to support climate-affected nations is also a priority after the recent COP agreement. Domestically, we continue to speak with one voice at the United Nations to amplify our concerns.





***“Our vision for CARICOM is one of **unity and resilience**, where regional cooperation allows us to **collectively overcome economic and environmental challenges.**”***

### Could you reflect on the achievements of the past 50 years of regional cooperation?

Over the past 50 years, we have established several specialized Regional Institutions in the areas of Education, Health, Agriculture, Disaster Management, Climate Change, and Crime & Security, which all work to enhance the benefits of regional integration.



We have been successful in establishing the Caribbean Development Bank, the Caribbean Court of Justice, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency, the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, the Caribbean Examinations Council, the Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS, and the Caribbean Public Health Agency, among others.

We already have a Community Agricultural Policy and a Double Taxation Agreement, and are in the process of finalizing a Community Industrial Policy among the Member States. We have harmonized standards, sanitary and phytosanitary measures and a Competition Policy. Additionally, we have implemented a CARICOM Multilateral Air Services Agreement which recognizes the Caribbean jurisdiction as a single space for airline registration.

A sound security network has been put in place, including a CARICOM Arrest Warrant Treaty, an Agreement on the Recovery and Sharing of Assets derived from criminal activity and a Counter Terrorism Strategy.

We have also made our voices heard and our votes count internationally. Along with sustained advocacy, we have become a respected voice in global affairs, most recently in the area of Climate Change and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). We are happy with the significant achievement of the Loss and Damage Fund. Further, the Bridgetown Initiative, seeks to galvanize political leadership behind an ambitious, but feasible set of policy reforms to address multiple crises, including the climate crisis.

Regional transport is also taking shape. Very soon we will be able to travel freely and seamlessly as citizens of CARICOM, not only for the upcoming International Cricket Council - ICC Men's T20 World Cup, but also by virtue of being citizens of the Community. This is part of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) and a tangible undertaking of uniting the peoples of the Caribbean.

The conceptualization of the CSME is a significant achievement. Through the CSME, we want to progressively and ultimately create a single, seamless economic space within our Community that provides a larger scale economic, trading and business environment. It is our platform for economic growth and development within our Region, as well as our foundation for international competitiveness and effective insertion in the global economy.



**How is CARICOM engaging the Caribbean youth in regional integration efforts?**

Since the late 1990s, we have had the CARICOM Youth Ambassador Corps, with each member state nominating two young ambassadors to promote regional integration. These youth ambassadors receive training and exposure, then share their knowledge with peers in their communities.

Recent initiatives include workshops on youth and climate change project proposals writing, and advocacy against violence towards women and children under the EU funded Regional Spotlight Initiative. Many former youth ambassadors now hold prominent leadership positions across the region.

**What strategies is CARICOM considering to improve food security?**

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed our reliance on food imports, prompting the CARICOM 25 by 2025 Initiative.

This aims to reduce our food import bill by 25% by 2025 through measures like boosting local crop and livestock production, reducing fertilizer imports, and strengthening the fishing sector. Increased domestic food production will enhance our food security and self-sufficiency.

**How are language and culture integrated into CARICOM's regional development policies?**

While CARICOM started as an English-speaking bloc, our Caribbean identity transcends language. The additions of Dutch-speaking Suriname and Francophone Haiti reflect our appreciation for linguistic diversity as part of our heterogeneous Caribbean identity.

As CARICOM becomes more inclusive, we naturally embrace the languages and cultures that unite us through our shared music, food, and heritage. The postponed CARIFESTA cultural festival is set to return in Barbados in 2025, celebrating this rich cultural tapestry.



## MEETING WITH ARMSTRONG ALEXIS

*Continued*

### **What are the next steps for the accession of the French territories as associate members?**

The political decision to welcome Martinique as an associate member was made at the Forty-Fifth Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community Forty-Fifth Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community in Trinidad and Tobago in July 2023. While the legal requirements and processes must still be satisfied, once Martinique meets all membership criteria, there should be no obstacles to its accession. The timeline depends on how swiftly these conditions are fulfilled by Martinique.

### **What economic and trade benefits could CARICOM integration bring to the French territories?**

As associate members, the French territories would contribute to and benefit from our single economic space, including free trade in goods and services, the right of establishment for businesses, and facilitated movement of people. They could participate in initiatives like the 25 by 2025 food security plan and access training opportunities. Ultimately, closer integration would foster shared experiences, a common ICT space, and a deeper understanding of our Caribbean identity.

### **How does CARICOM intend to promote the assets and unique features of new associate members?**

New members are traditionally welcomed at the next Heads of Government meeting, which garners significant media attention. Their flags would be flown alongside existing members', and CARICOM would issue statements introducing them as Associate Members of the Caribbean Community. There would also be opportunities to share their cultural offerings, fostering greater connectivity and integration within our Caribbean family.



### **Finally, as CARICOM moves forward with its initiatives and continues to address various challenges, what is your vision for the future of the Caribbean community?**

That's an excellent question. My vision for the future of CARICOM is one of increased unity, resilience, and sustainable development. We are at a pivotal moment where our actions today will shape the future for generations to come. I envision a Caribbean where regional cooperation is seamless, allowing us to leverage our collective strengths to overcome challenges such as climate change, economic volatility, and social disparities.



***“Empowering our youth through education and leadership programs is crucial for the future of CARICOM, as they will be the ones to lead us towards sustainable development.”***

To achieve this, we must continue to foster a strong sense of community among our member states. This involves not only political and economic cooperation but also cultural and social integration. Initiatives like the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) are vital in ensuring that goods, services, and people can move freely across our borders, creating a more robust and interconnected regional economy.

Moreover, engaging our youth is crucial. The future of CARICOM lies in the hands of the next generation. By empowering young people through education, training, and opportunities, we can ensure they are prepared to lead and innovate. Programs like the CARICOM Youth Ambassador Program are a step in the right direction, but we must continue to expand and support such initiatives.

Another key aspect is addressing environmental sustainability. The Caribbean is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. We must advocate for global action while also implementing local strategies to protect our ecosystems and communities. This includes investing in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and disaster resilience.

Finally, strengthening our financial systems and ensuring access to development financing are critical. We need to work towards financial independence and stability to support our development goals. Initiatives like the Bridgetown Initiative and the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index are essential in this regard.

In closing, I want to remind us of the four pillars of the Community:

- Economic Integration
- Human and Social Development



- Foreign Policy Coordination
- Security Cooperation.

Together these provide a broad menu for us to conceptualize, shape, and implement an integration movement that should remain the longest lasting of its kind in the developing world.

We commit to not allowing French West Indies - French Guiana regional cooperation to be limited to just one, or a few areas. Instead, today and in the coming periods, we can be more ambitious, challenging ourselves to explore deeper areas of cooperation, and thereby ensure that the next 50 years and beyond sees our Community as the most exemplary in this Hemisphere.

**On behalf of CARICOM, I look forward to the finalization of the formalities that will mark the entry of Martinique, French Guiana and Guadeloupe into the friendly embrace of the Caribbean Community.**

**I look forward to the continued progress of CARICOM and the collective efforts to strengthen our region. Let's work together for a prosperous Caribbean future.**

## A clear vision for Regional Cooperation in the Caribbean

Mr. Olivier Jacob, Director General of Overseas Territories (DGOM) since last August, has recently shared his vision and initiatives regarding regional cooperation in the Caribbean. With a career rich in experiences within the prefectural administration and key positions at the Ministry of the Interior and Overseas Territories, he is well-equipped to contribute to the effective adaptation of public policies to the specific realities of the Overseas Territories.

In this comprehensive interview, he discusses the issues, progress, and challenges of regional cooperation for the French Overseas Territories.

**Mr. Jacob, can you tell us about your background and your role as Director-General of Overseas Territories?**

My name is Olivier Jacob, and I assumed the role of Director-General of Overseas Territories in August of last year. Before that, I had a diverse career in what is known as the prefectural corps, holding various positions across France, including in French Polynesia. I also served as a deputy director within the Directorate-General of Overseas Territories and twice as deputy chief of staff, first for the Secretary of State for Overseas Territories and then for the Minister Delegate for Overseas Territories. My career has allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the Overseas Territories and their specificities.

**Can you explain what your current role entails and how it differs from that of a prefect?**

My current position is that of a central administration director, responsible for ensuring the proper implementation of state public policies in the Overseas Territories. This involves adapting these policies to local realities, as it is impossible to apply them uniformly between mainland France and the Overseas Territories. Whether in education, health, housing, or economic development, public policies often need to be adjusted to meet the specific needs of the Overseas Territories.

My daily role is to raise awareness among my colleagues about this necessity for adaptation.

***“France's commitment to the region is a testament to our determination to support our overseas territories.”***





***“Regional cooperation is essential for the economic and social development of our territories.”***



## ***“We are planning to organize a regional security conference in 2025, including all the states of the Caribbean region.”***

**Now, let's delve into regional cooperation. What have been the recent developments in this area?**

Regional cooperation is a key aspect of our activities. At the 17th Regional Cooperation Conference French West Indies - French Guiana, a joint political declaration was signed between the Minister Delegate in charge of Overseas Territories and six presidents of overseas collectivities. This declaration aims to adopt a common strategy for the Caribbean region and the Guiana Plateau, a first of its kind. It marks the first time such a unified strategy has been adopted, which is a significant step forward.

**What is France's main role in the regional cooperation of the French West Indies - French Guiana and the Caribbean? What have been the key outcomes and agreements?**

Since the 1990s, the State has supported the regional integration of French Caribbean Territories, such as Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana. These territories have specific competencies for regional cooperation, enabling them to better integrate into their geographical environment.

**What are the important steps for Martinique's membership in CARICOM, and what about the other territories?**

Martinique is in the process of joining CARICOM as an associate member, a process supported by the French government. At the 17th Regional Cooperation Conference, this issue was widely discussed, and we hope to finalize membership this summer.

Similarly, we support the negotiations for French Guiana's membership, which will take a bit longer, and Saint-Martin's membership in the OECS, where discussions are almost complete. As for Saint-Barthélemy, the collectivity has not yet expressed a desire to join any specific regional organization. However, we remain attentive to their needs and ready to support any initiative aimed at strengthening their regional integration.

**And regarding the Caribbean Development Bank?**

France has decided to rejoin the Caribbean Development Bank, a process initiated during the Interministerial Committee for Overseas Territories in July 2020.

The application letter will be sent soon, followed by negotiations for an accession agreement and parliamentary ratification. Once a member, French companies, particularly those from the Overseas Territories, will be able to bid for the bank's tenders, thereby stimulating regional economic development. This represents a major opportunity for companies in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and other territories to better integrate into the Caribbean environment.





**How does France address regional security issues, such as combating drug trafficking and managing natural disasters, in cooperation with neighboring countries?**

The CCRAAG has focused on regional security and environmental issues, including combating criminal trafficking and the international sargassum initiative. Can you explain the concrete measures that will be implemented following these discussions?

Combating drug and arms trafficking is crucial, especially in French Guiana, where Brazilian gangs are trying to establish themselves. In this regard, **we are planning to organize a regional security conference in 2025, including all the states of the Caribbean region.** This initiative aims to strengthen cooperation and transparency in the fight against organized crime, a major problem in the region. The Minister Delegate in charge of Overseas Territories proposed this conference at the last regional cooperation conference.

Additionally, we have launched an international initiative to combat sargassum, in collaboration with the Regional Council of Guadeloupe. This initiative, presented at COP 28 in Dubai, will be further developed at the UN Ocean Summit in 2025 in France.

**What about natural disaster management?**

We have supported the swift signing of an agreement between France and the Caribbean Emergency Management Agency, CARICOM's natural disaster management agency. This agreement will strengthen our cooperation in preventing and combating major natural risks, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis.

**How can the recommendations aimed at strengthening export support in the overseas territories, including the potential creation of 'Team France Export' structures in Saint-Martin and Saint-Barthélemy, boost local businesses?**

The conference's recommendations aim to strengthen export support for overseas businesses. The creation of 'Team France Export' structures in Saint-Martin and Saint-Barthélemy will better support local businesses in their international endeavors. This includes setting up training sessions, providing personalized advice, and forming partnerships with regional and international economic actors. These measures will invigorate the local economy by opening new markets for overseas businesses.

***“Our priority is to ensure that public policies are perfectly tailored to the local realities of Overseas Territories.”***

**The conference highlighted the importance of cultural exchanges and the promotion of Francophonie while respecting the multilingual and multicultural context of the region. What strategies are being developed to improve the mobility of artists and cultural collaboration in the region?**

At the 17th Regional Cooperation Conference, two key recommendations were made to strengthen cultural exchanges. The first aims to better utilize existing tools to promote the mobility of artists in the Caribbean and the Guiana Shield, particularly through the Caribbean Mobility Fund and artist residencies. The second recommendation seeks to promote Francophonie while respecting the multilingual and multicultural context of the region. This includes increased efforts from the French diplomatic network and overseas collectivities, as well as universities, to encourage cultural and linguistic exchanges.

**How do you see the evolution of this regional cooperation in the coming years?**

We have several areas of focus for the coming years: security, climate change, biodiversity, economic development, and cultural and human exchanges. Support from the European Union through funds like INTERREG-CARIBBEAN is crucial, and we must ensure that these funds are maintained and strengthened beyond 2026. Regional cooperation is an area where much remains to be done, but we are determined to move forward. We must also prepare to negotiate the future cohesion policy of the European Union, highlighting the specificities of our outermost regions. Finally, our priority is to ensure that public policies are perfectly adapted to the local realities of the Overseas Territories.

**Regional cooperation in the Caribbean is essential for the harmonious development of the Overseas Territories.**

**Under the leadership of Mr. Olivier Jacob, this cooperation is making significant progress despite the challenges to be faced.**

**France's efforts to support regional integration and fight against common threats demonstrate a strong commitment to the security and prosperity of this strategic region.**



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## The regional integration of French Caribbean Territories: A complex but crucial challenge

Establishing a presence within the network of Caribbean organizations poses a significant challenge for French Caribbean communities. Overcoming cultural, legal, and strategic obstacles is essential for success in this complex environment.

Mr. Jean-Yves Lacascade, a keen strategist in this regional integration for the Territorial Collectivity of Martinique, sheds light on the progress, setbacks, and future prospects for firmly anchoring Martinique in the regional landscape.

From behind-the-scenes negotiations with CARICOM to the upcoming challenges of the EU-ACP agreement, he provides an analysis that is as rich as it is uncompromising. A deep dive into the realities of integration that is well worth a look!

**Mr. Lacascade, can you explain the role and position of Martinique in this context of regional integration?**

Martinique is currently involved in three major regional organizations: the ACS (Association of Caribbean States), the OECS (Organization of Eastern Caribbean States), and CARICOM (Caribbean Community). This integration process is extremely complex and requires a comprehensive understanding of the history of Caribbean regional integration.



***The Letchimy law of 2016 has been a real springboard for the external action of local authorities.***

**Could you provide further insights into the development of this regional integration process?**

The genesis of Caribbean integration dates back to 1958 with the Federation of the British West Indies, the first regional integration effort that unfortunately failed. Then, CARICOM, the result of 11 years of efforts, was created in 1973 by Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago, and Guyana.

Since 2001, it has been operating under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas.

Since 2001, it has operated under the provisions of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas.

The OECS was established in 1981 through a treaty signed in Basseterre. It has 11 member states, with 7 being full members. Martinique became the first French-speaking associate member in 2015, followed by Guadeloupe in 2019. Saint-Martin is anticipated to join as an associate member in 2024.





***“The regional integration of French Caribbean communities is a **gradual process** that must be approached **one step** at a time.”***

## ***The role of the outermost regions in the upcoming EU-ACP agreement will be the keystone for the next two decades.***

### **What role did the French legislative framework play in this process?**

Numerous laws have facilitated the accession of French communities as observer or associate members. The 1990 overseas orientation law initially introduced this option. Subsequently, the Juppé-Penchard circular in 1995 was succeeded by the Law concerning the external action of local authorities and overseas cooperation, ratified on December 5, 2016 (Letchimy Law). This law has been a real accelerator by enabling the implementation of territorial diplomacy.

### **What role does the European Union play in this regional cooperation?**

The EU plays a major role because Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Saint-Martin are European outermost regions. Europe has deepened its connections with the ACP nations (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) since the Lomé Agreement in 1975, followed by the Cotonou Agreement in 2000, and now the Samoa Agreement signed in 2023. This agreement specifically allows ORs (outermost regions) and OCTs (overseas countries and territories) to join the Caribbean protocol outlined within it. It is crucial for France to ensure that our regions are fully involved in the European strategy for the Caribbean in the coming two decades.

### **How is this expansion and deepening of regional integration progressing?**

We must keep in mind that Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Saint-Barthélemy are part of the "Greater Caribbean." The AEC (Association of Caribbean States) brings together all the countries with a border on the Caribbean Sea, of which we are associate members.

The process of joining CARICOM has been arduous, having to overcome the cultural and linguistic challenges of the English-speaking world. But in April 2023, President Letchimy was invited to the CARICOM Security Conference, indicating shared challenges.

The French government also played a significant role in the implementation of measure # 12 of the CIOM (Interministerial Committee for Overseas Territories), acknowledging the significance of the DROMs' (overseas departments and regions) membership in CARICOM.

After overcoming legal obstacles, France proposed adhering to the CARICOM Privileges and Immunities Protocol for Martinique, paving the way for other French-speaking overseas territories. The next CARICOM summit could see our full membership.

### **A final word?**

I wish to emphasize once more the significance of the ORs being linked to the execution of the Caribbean protocol of the Samoa Agreement between the EU and the ACP countries. This is pivotal for European initiatives in the Caribbean over the upcoming 20 years. It is imperative that we secure our involvement in this vital strategy.

THIS COMPREHENSIVE AINSIGHT FROM MR. LACASCADE HIGHLIGHTS HOW **COMPLEX BUT ESSENTIAL THE REGIONAL INTEGRATION OF FRENCH CARIBBEAN COMMUNITIES IN THE REGION. IT ENCOMPASSES VARIOUS LEGAL, DIPLOMATIC, AND STRATEGIC ISSUES AT LOCAL, REGIONAL AND EUROPEAN LEVEL. THE UPCOMING MONTHS AND YEARS WILL BE DECISIVE IN CONSOLIDATING THIS INTEGRATION AND SHAPING FUTURE DIRECTIONS.**



# How can the Caribbean cooperate on **climate change and sustainable development?**

## PANEL 1 - ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The discussion focused on improving the ability of the French West Indies and French Guiana to adapt to climate change. Key initiatives included the preservation of mangroves, combating coastal erosion, and promoting resilient agricultural practices through the CCRAF network.

HOST: Marianna MARTEL, Coordinator for the Sustainable Territories Unit, ADEME Guadeloupe

SPEAKERS: Crispin d'AUVERGNE, Climate Coordinator, OECS - Damien BAUCHAU, Associate Director, Unite Caribbean - Marc DUBERNET, Atlantic Director, Agence Française de Développement (AFD) Gregg RAWLINS, Representative of IICA (Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture) for the Eastern Caribbean - Ywenn de la TORRE, Regional Director for Guadeloupe, BRGM (French Geological Survey)



## PANEL 2 - WASTE AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY

This panel highlighted the importance of modernizing waste management and promoting circular economy solutions to reduce CO2 emissions. Key projects included waste-to-energy initiatives in Saint Martin and the pooling of WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) flows across the French West Indies.



HOST: Laurent POULAIN, Waste and Circular Economy Engineer, ADEME Guadeloupe

SPEAKERS: Maxime ARNAL, Director, VERDE SXM - Vincent BRUNEAU, Operations Manager Energipôle Antilles - Stéphane TANT, Managing Director and Chairman of the Executive Board of the Grand Port Maritime de la Guyane

## PANEL 3 - MITIGATING CLIMATE CHANGE AND DEVELOPING RENEWABLE ENERGIES

Discussions centered on reducing greenhouse gas emissions by transitioning to renewable energy sources. The RESEMBID programme and innovative projects like the energy ship by Farwind Energy, which harnesses wind energy at sea, were key highlights.

HOST: Jonathan MULLER, Renewable energy and sustainable mobility engineer, ADEME Guadeloupe

SPEAKERS: Nicolas CHENET, Director of the Sustainable Development Department, Expertise France Arnaud POITOU, Chairman of Farwind Energy - Ywenn de la TORRE, Regional Director for Guadeloupe, BRGM (French Geological Survey)



## PANEL 4 - RECYCLING SARGASSUM

The focus was on managing the chronic issue of sargassum beaching. The panel discussed strategies such as immediate collection, re-immersion, and recycling. The international sargassum initiative and cooperation under the SargNet network were also emphasized.



HOST: Jérôme ROCH, Regional Director, ADEME Guadeloupe

SPEAKERS: Ligia COLLADO-VIDES, Professor, Florida International University - Charlotte GULLY, Coordinator for the Circular Economy Unit, ADEME Martinique Sylvie GUSTAVE DIT DUFLU, Vice-President, Guadeloupe Region - Rosa RODRIGUEZ-MARTINEZ, Marine Biologist, Institute of Marine Sciences and Limnology, National Autonomous University of Mexico



**SCAN THE QR CODE TO ACCESS THE DETAILED EVENT SUMMARY, PRESENTED BY ADEME GUADELOUPE.**



EVENT REPORT

## Coordinating efforts for effective results in the Caribbean

At the 17th Regional Cooperation Conference, held for the first time in Saint Martin, Philippe Jock, President of the Martinique Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIM), presented a comprehensive and bold vision, along with concrete proposals, to stimulate economic integration within the French West Indies - French Guiana area. In a speech that was both dense and engaging, he highlighted the key action levers needed to address the challenges of trade relations with our neighbors and redefine the contours of Caribbean exchanges.

**Mr. Jock, as President of the CCIM, what is your perspective on the current state of regional economic cooperation? What are the major obstacles and opportunities?**

Cooperation and mutualization are crucial to effectively address the economic challenges of our region. Trade exchanges are still in their infancy, as evidenced by our exports of approximately 1.2 million euros to Saint Lucia and 1 million to Saint Martin, primarily rum, while we import 17 million from the Caribbean. We identified several major obstacles during this conference, such as issues with air and maritime connectivity, as well as standardization problems, although progress has been made in the construction sector.

**What are your key proposals to overcome these obstacles and accelerate Caribbean exchanges?**

Firstly, economic cooperation must be realized through very targeted actions. During our prospecting mission to Saint Lucia, we emphasized meticulous preparation, fruitful exchanges with private, public, and local institutions, a program of targeted meetings, networking activities, and rigorous follow-up to sustain the initiated exchanges.

Secondly, pooling our actions with our counterparts from the Guadeloupe Islands and the Caribbean Chambers of Commerce is important.

By uniting our resources, the results are more effective for businesses.

This is why we are founding members of the Caricham network, which brings together 23 chambers of commerce from the Caribbean. Through the INTERREG-CARIBBEAN SCBC (Strengthening the Caribbean Business Community) project, we have participated in seminars to standardize our practices in business support and organized a successful joint mission to Barbados.

In early 2021 in Saint Lucia and last year in Guyana, we, along with our counterparts from Guadeloupe and French Guiana, offered our businesses the opportunity to explore these markets and meet new business partners.

**Beyond traditional goods exports, what other areas do you recommend?**

It is essential to have an expanded vision of exports, including services. Economic cooperation in this area has already made significant progress in promising sectors such as renewable energy, digital technology, and civil engineering. Many of our young entrepreneurs are very active in the Caribbean. We need to accelerate this process.

Mr. GADARKHAN, managing his group in Guadeloupe, gave a striking testimony of his experience over several years in the Caribbean, where he was able to develop his group's activities. We must learn from this.



*It is also a **matter of trust** among the players, and we are the **only ones capable of forging these links** with our Caribbean neighbors.*



## MEETING WITH PHILIPPE JOCK

*Continued*

**ou emphasized the importance of proximity, can you elaborate?**

Recently, within the framework of the INTERREG-CARIBBEAN TEECA (Trade Enhancement for Eastern Caribbean) project, we established a Caribbean support office in Saint Lucia, managed on-site by an international business volunteer with the assistance of two collaborators from our international service. This is a major asset for developing our economic ties in the Caribbean region. However, it is vital to make this strategic position permanent, which is why we are seeking partners to ensure its sustainable funding. Proximity is a key factor for the success of our regional integration.

**What are the other priority areas you recommend?**

It is crucial to strengthen our ties with development and investment institutions in the region. Creating a favorable environment to attract economic actors looking to invest in the Caribbean is an absolute priority. This involves better visibility on investment opportunities, enhanced collaboration between states, local authorities, and structures that support businesses in their internationalization, as well as increased pooling of resources and information.

Training is also a strategic priority. We support initiatives aimed at attracting more Caribbean students to our universities to develop common skills in trade and industry management. This welcome should be reinforced, particularly in management training. These human connections established during studies will greatly facilitate future economic exchanges.

Finally, with the support of the French Development Agency, which has already positioned itself to assist us, we propose establishing a regular meeting dedicated to business relations between the French Caribbean Territories and Caribbean neighbors.



Similar to the Miami conference that brought together business communities from the Greater Caribbean and the USA. Under the aegis of Europe, it would bring together all key Caribbean actors: businesses, states, local authorities, and donors. This unique event would move beyond mere cooperation to fully embrace the economic/business dimension of our relations with our neighbors. On this occasion, presentations of programs and development visions by public actors would provide visibility to private actors, while the presence of financial organizations would facilitate project financing. For the leaders of INTERREG-CARIBBEAN projects, a real pooling of funded actions would then be possible to optimize the program's impacts. This Caribbean economic meeting would be a major lever for the sustainable internationalization of our businesses.

### A final word?

**To succeed in export, one must first be strong in the domestic market.**

**By keeping this reality in mind, while adopting a global and integrated approach, we can significantly and sustainably evolve our regional business.**



## Strengthened Regional Cooperation and challenges to overcome

During the 17th French West Indies - French Guiana Regional Cooperation Conference, we had the opportunity to speak with Didacus Jules, Director General of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). In this interview, he discussed the challenges the organization faces, the opportunities provided by the affiliation of Martinique and Guadeloupe, as well as the guiding principles for successful regional cooperation.

### Could you briefly introduce yourself and tell us about your role within the OECS?

I am Didacus Jules, the Director General of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). My role is to ensure that we progress in the regional integration process, in accordance with the objectives set by the revised Treaty of Basseterre.

### What are the main challenges facing the OECS today and how do you plan to address them?

The main challenge for the OECS is to realize the ambitions of the revised Treaty of Basseterre, which calls for the creation of an economic union, the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital, as well as the harmonization of policies across various sectors. For the member states of the protocol, this means establishing a single economic space similar to that of the European Union. We need to act quickly to achieve these goals.

### The affiliation of Martinique and Guadeloupe to the OECS as associate members, and the upcoming arrival of Saint-Martin, represent an important step for regional integration. What are the next steps to strengthen cooperation between OECS members and other Caribbean territories?

Indeed, Martinique and Guadeloupe are already associate members of the OECS and Saint-Martin is about to become one.

The presence of the French territories is very important to us, as they have very different constitutional and political autonomy arrangements compared to British territories, and they share geographical, linguistic (in the case of the Kweyol-speaking countries) and cultural proximity with the other OECS Member States.

Cooperation in the health and education sectors has already been fruitful, with OECS students being able to study at universities in Martinique and Guadeloupe at a lower cost and continue their studies in Europe. The commercial standards and norms in the French territories comply with French and European standards, offering OECS countries the opportunity to improve their own standards and access new markets.



***“It is imperative that we **unite our forces within the OECS** to address issues such as climate change, food security, and economic inequalities, which affect all our member states.”***





***“By investing in resilient infrastructure projects and sustainable development initiatives, we can transform our economies and provide better future prospects for our young generation.”***

**Could you tell us more about the priorities and specific expectations expressed by Martinique and Guadeloupe in the context of their integration into the OECS?**

In an early 2023 special meeting, Martinique expressed its intention to maintain a strong commitment to its population while considering the economic and social aspects linked to its EU membership. President Letchimy highlighted five priorities: sea and air transport, the digital economy, trade and entrepreneurship.

The goal is not independence from France, but a strengthened association of Martinique with the regional development of the Caribbean, from which future economic growth will arise.

**What are the main opportunities and challenges specific to the integration of the French associate territories?**

Despite our different institutional frameworks, there are many opportunities for us. We are exploring the possibility for these territories to obtain the status of Protocol members of the OECS. We aim to strengthen our ties in critical areas of shared concern such as security and combating transnational crime.

The adoption of European trading standards by the OECS would open up huge business opportunities with Europe, in addition to facilitating trade with the French territories. However, we must establish interoperability between our various administrative and financial systems.

## WE AIM TO STRENGTHEN OUR TIES IN CRITICAL AREAS OF SHARED CONCERN

For Guadeloupe, the priorities include greater inclusion in regional programs, a leading role on environmental issues and the fight against climate change, economic integration, diversification of investments, administrative reorganization, management of the sargassum phenomenon, youth training, entrepreneurship and sports as catalysts for economic development.

There is a convergence with the key areas identified by Martinique: sea transport, digital economy, green energy transition, and diversification of the economy.

Another challenge is the current exclusion of associate members from certain programs funded by development partners and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank.

We need to develop new financing modalities, particularly related to the environment and climate. In terms of connectivity, the liberalization of maritime and air transport, as well as harmonization with European regulations, are essential for facilitating trade.

Finally, linguistic and cultural differences present both a challenge and an opportunity to be seized through language exchanges, festivals, exhibitions, and the promotion of regional tourism.

### **Could you tell us more about the practical means envisioned for deepening the integration of the French associate members?**

Certainly. Too often, discussions on regional integration remain at the level of rhetoric and generalities. We want to move to concrete action, even if progress is limited at first. For example, Martinique and Guadeloupe could serve as shipping hubs for direct exports to Europe, benefiting from their link with France. Additionally, everything we undertake, whether at the local, territorial, or state level, must have a positive impact on the population.

We must therefore support the aspirations of civil society itself at every level, from families to communities. This is what guides our roadmap for further integration, encompassing human development, youth, education, environmental resilience, tourism, as well as issues of crime, immigration and security that require a multi-level partnership approach.

In terms of civil society, we also target economic development, education, health, sports, and cultural promotion as vectors of integration.

Traditional solutions such as scholarships, sports competitions and also innovative initiatives are considered. These include student exchange semesters with discussion groups on social networks, youth festivals showcasing music, visual arts, fashion, dance, and spoken arts in English, French and Kweyol.

Or the promotion of agriculture among the youth, since farmers are an aging population in the OECS.

In sports, in addition to existing competitions, we are looking at professionalizing and developing new disciplines. Guadeloupe has a high-performance sports training center that is poised to become the OECS center of specialization for preparation of our sportspersons for international competitions. With French ferries (for example L'Express des Isles) traversing the islands and with improved maritime connectivity, it should be easy to move these teams to Guadeloupe for this intensive training.

In tourism, we already observe flows of visitors between the islands, like Martinicans coming to shop in Saint Lucia over the weekend. We can amplify this type of exchange. The goal is to act pragmatically to create new products and opportunities through the convergence of our institutions, even if it is done in small successive steps.



### **What are the priority sectors for the OECS in terms of cooperation and regional integration?**

The priority sectors for the OECS include agriculture, tourism, transportation, energy, telecommunications, and the management of natural disasters. In each of these areas, we seek to strengthen cooperation and harmonize policies and regulations in order to create an environment conducive to the economic and social development of our member states.



## How does the OECS plan to involve local populations and civil society more in the regional integration process?

The involvement of local populations and civil society is essential to ensure the success of regional integration. We are actively working to strengthen stakeholder participation in our decision-making and implementation processes by organizing public consultations, workshops and discussion forums.

Furthermore, we encourage exchanges between civil society organizations, universities and research institutes of our member states to foster the sharing of knowledge and best practices.



## Could you provide us with some key figures about the OECS, such as the number of member countries?

The OECS currently has 12 member states, of which 6 are independent and 6 are non-independent territories. Among these, three are French overseas territories (Martinique, Guadeloupe and Saint-Martin) and three are British Overseas Territories.

MEMBER	AREA (km <sup>2</sup> )	POPULATION	GDP - US\$M
Antigua & Barbuda	442.6	104,084	2,390.0
Dominica	751	74,679	851.0
Grenada	344	108,825	1,590.0
St. Kitts & Nevis	261	56,345	1,528.0
Saint Lucia	606	180,454	2,384.0
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	389	110,256	1,281.0
Montserrat	102	5,220	43.8
Anguilla	91	15,174	175.4
British Virgin Islands (BVI)	151	32,206	500.0
<b>Sub Totals</b>	<b>3,137.60</b>	<b>687,243</b>	<b>10,743.2</b>
Guadeloupe	1,628	395,700	10,300.0
Martinique	1,128	376,480	10,700.0
St. Martin	34	77,741	599.0
<b>Sub Totals</b>	<b>2,790</b>	<b>849,921</b>	<b>21,599</b>
<b>OECS TOTALS</b>	<b>5,927.6</b>	<b>1,537,164.0</b>	<b>32,342.2</b>

## Do you have a message or final words concerning cooperation between the islands?

Given the current volatility of the world, it is crucial for us to act quickly. At the OECS, we follow several principles to guide our approach:

- Firstly, we believe that a project must fundamentally change the sector in which it is being implemented, changing the institutional DNA so that we make real sustainable progress.
- Secondly, we focus on concrete actions to ensure that regional integration has a positive impact on the lives and livelihoods of people in the region, ensuring everyone can benefit, regardless of their income level.
- Finally, I would like to emphasize that cooperation between the islands is essential to face common challenges and seize the opportunities that arise. By working together, we can strengthen our resilience, promote sustainable development and improve citizens' quality of life. That's why we will continue to work for closer regional integration and increased cooperation among the members of the OECS and other Caribbean territories.

Regional integration is a lengthy but vital process for our small island territories to meet the challenges of a complex world and take advantage of the opportunities that arise. With vision, mutual understanding, clarity, agility and an increased awareness of our interdependence, we can turn the dangerous winds of today's instability into a breath of hope and progress for future generations.

## Strengthening Caribbean unity

In an era where regional cooperation is pivotal, Rodolfo Sabonge, Secretary General of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), addressed key issues and strategic initiatives during the XVII Caribbean Conference on Regional Cooperation (CCRAG) in Saint-Martin. This comprehensive interview explores Sabonge's insights on enhancing economic integration, disaster risk management, and social equity within the Caribbean. Through his speech, he emphasized the importance of unified efforts to tackle the region's most pressing challenges.

### **What were the primary objectives of the XVII CCRAG, and how do they align with the broader goals of the ACS?**

The XVII CCRAG aimed to deepen regional cooperation among and between Caribbean states and territories, which is a cornerstone of the ACS's mission. Our broader goals include promoting sustainable development, economic integration, and disaster risk reduction. This conference was a platform to discuss and advance these objectives by fostering dialogue and collaboration. The emphasis was on finding collective solutions to common challenges like climate change, economic vulnerabilities and social inequalities.

### **Economic integration was a significant focus of your speech. Can you detail the initiatives designed to enhance economic cooperation within the region?**

Absolutely. One of the flagship initiatives is the Caribbean Economic Cooperation Program. This program is designed to harmonize trade policies, reduce trade barriers, and facilitate smoother economic transactions across the region. We're also working on enhancing transportation networks and digital support to enhance economic activity.

By reducing tariffs and standardizing regulations, we aim to increase intra-regional trade significantly. This will not only boost economic growth but also create jobs and improve living standards across the Caribbean.

For instance, improving port infrastructure and logistics will make it easier for goods to move between islands, reducing costs and delivery times. This, in turn, supports local businesses by providing them with broader markets and more efficient supply chains.

### **Disaster risk management is crucial for the Caribbean. What measures are being implemented to strengthen resilience against natural disasters?**

The Caribbean's vulnerability to natural disasters requires robust disaster risk management strategies. We have initiated several programs focused on building community resilience and enhancing our disaster response capabilities. These include the development of early warning systems, investment in disaster-resistant infrastructure, and the promotion of community-based preparedness plans.

For example, our partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) aims to bolster the region's disaster response mechanisms. This includes training local responders, improving coordination between agencies, and securing funding for rapid recovery efforts.

Additionally, we've launched public awareness campaigns to educate citizens on disaster preparedness, ensuring that they know how to act before, during, and after a disaster.



A man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a blue suit and a blue patterned tie, is speaking at a clear acrylic podium. A large, vibrant floral arrangement featuring yellow lilies, white lilies, yellow chrysanthemums, red gerberas, and white anthurums is in the foreground. To the left, a purple banner with white text is partially visible. To the right, the French flag and the European Union flag are displayed on poles. The background is a dark curtain.

*“The emphasis was on  
finding collective  
solutions to common  
challenges like climate  
change,  
economic  
vulnerabilities and  
social inequalities..”*

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***“Tackling **social inequality** requires a **multifaceted approach**, focusing on education, healthcare, and social protection.”***

**Social inequality remains a significant issue in the Caribbean. What strategies is the ACS employing to address these disparities?**

Tackling social inequality requires a multifaceted approach. Each regional organisation working on sustainable development in the Caribbean leverages one or several of these facets. Given its areas of focus - namely transport and trade development - the ACS approach to diminishing social inequality is fostering public-private partnerships and SME development across various sectors, with a particular emphasis on strengthening female led business.

This holistic approach ensures that our efforts are sustainable and impactful in the long term, enhancing economic development and thereby benefitting society on the whole

**How does the ACS plan to engage with international partners to further its goals?**

International collaboration is vital for achieving our objectives. We are actively seeking partnerships with global organizations, donor agencies, and other regional blocs to secure funding, technical assistance, and policy support. These collaborations are crucial for scaling our initiatives and achieving sustainable development.

For instance, our partnerships with environmental organizations help us implement effective climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. By working with international partners, we can bring in best practices, advanced technologies, and financial resources that are essential for the Caribbean's growth and resilience.

**What are some specific outcomes you hope to achieve through these initiatives?**

We aim to create a more integrated and resilient Caribbean region.

In the economic sphere, we expect to see increased trade and investment, leading to higher economic growth and job creation and by extension social protection.

For disaster risk management, our goal is to significantly reduce the loss of life and property during natural disasters through improved preparedness and response.

These outcomes will contribute to a more stable and prosperous region, where all citizens have the opportunity to thrive.







**Rodolfo Sabonge's address at the 17th CCRAAG underscores the critical role of regional cooperation in addressing the Caribbean's challenges.**

**From economic integration and disaster risk management to social equity, the initiatives highlighted in this interview reflect a comprehensive strategy aimed at fostering a resilient, prosperous, and inclusive Caribbean.**

**As the region moves forward, the collaborative efforts led by the ACS will be pivotal in shaping a brighter future for all Caribbean nations.**

## Strengthening regional integration, a major challenge for the Caribbean

For the European Union, promoting regional integration in the Caribbean is a priority objective. Mr. Felipe de la Mota, responsible for regional cooperation for this area from his office in Barbados, discusses the issues, challenges, and opportunities for better coordination among Caribbean countries.

### **Can you introduce your role and your missions within the European Union for regional cooperation in the Caribbean?**

I am the Team Leader for the EU's economic resilience and trade programs in the Caribbean. With my team and my colleagues in the environmental and security sections, I work on digital topics, regional integration, trade relations, and support for the private sector and the trade program in the region. We cover all regional programs with Caribbean countries, even though some delegations manage bilateral relations with specific countries. We are, in a way, the hub of the EU's presence in this region.

### **What is the exact hierarchy between your regional team and the various bilateral delegations?**

Each delegation (7 in total in the Caribbean) has an ambassador who manages the political and development bilateral relations with the concerned country. I am part of a cross-cutting team that specifically oversees regional development cooperation programs, under the direction of a regional cooperation chief.

### **How long have you held these functions in the region?**

I have been here for over 5 years, which is quite exceptional for a European official. I will leave next year, feeling that I have helped evolve many things despite the challenges of this complex and fascinating region that is the Caribbean, which I know well from having been here before.



### **What are the main challenges that regional cooperation faces in this area?**

The Caribbean faces enormous challenges. First, climate change, whose effects are already evident. Then, the excessive economic dependence of many islands on tourism, whose limitations were exposed by COVID-19 when this revenue dried up, having a major impact on food security and supply issues for these territories that import 90% of their basic goods.

One of the main challenges, the cross-cutting one, is the concrete implementation of real regional integration, despite the the strong ambitions expressed.





***“The current momentum with the entry of French territories into regional organizations must be an opportunity to take a decisive step forward.”***

## MEETING WITH FELIPE DE LA MOTA

*Continued*

Countries struggle to transfer competencies to regional institutions with real supranational powers, as has been done in Europe. This is a process that, regardless of the chosen path, will take time.

### **Are there any additional significant projects or collaborations in the Caribbean region that you would like to highlight?**

Absolutely, in addition to the initiatives we have already discussed, there are several other collaborations worth highlighting. For example, we are working on strengthening capacities in the public health sector to better manage future health crises. This initiative includes training, equipping laboratories, and implementing improved emergency protocols.

### **What is the concrete benefit for French Caribbean territories like Martinique to join regional organizations?**

The inclusion of Martinique, and soon Guadeloupe and Saint-Martin, as associate members of the OECS and CARICOM will allow them to better coordinate politically and economically with other countries while remaining within the European framework. Their presence in these forums for discussions on regulatory, environmental, or digital standards, for example, will also be key to showcasing European standards and expertise in the region.

Being at the negotiation table is essential.



Photo of the launch of cooperation partnerships with EU Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen and ministers from the region. This notable event, held in Barbados in November 2022, focused on the implementation and planning of regional cooperation programs in the Caribbean for the period 2021-2027.

We are also supporting climate resilience projects that aim to strengthen local infrastructures and communities against the increasingly severe effects of climate change. These efforts are crucial to ensuring sustainable growth and security in the region.

### **Will businesses from these territories be able to access regional markets more easily?**

Our European cooperation funds with third countries do not specifically target European businesses.

However, we help third countries align with EU standards, thereby facilitating market access for our businesses.

We also organize trade fairs and events to promote economic, educational, and cultural interactions between European and Caribbean businesses.

***“If countries do not move forward as one, no one will, and the issues will remain unaddressed at the right scale.”***



***The region has enormous ambitions, but their implementation struggles without a real transfer of competencies to supranational institutions.***

**2024 seems to be a pivotal year. Can you tell us more about the specific projects planned?**

In 2024, a significant turning point will be reached after the EU-CELAC summits in July 2023. The focus will be on the Global Gateway investment strategy, an initiative that is green, digital, and inclusive, with direct implications for the Caribbean and the European overseas territories in the region.

The Samoa Partnership Agreement was recently signed, while the 20th OCT Forum in Brussels in February addressed better association of these territories with common EU-Caribbean policies.

The Gateway strategy's three main priorities for the coming months include:

- **The Digital Alliance**, aiming to better connect the region through the sharing of European satellite programs, a regional cybersecurity center in Santo Domingo, the extension of the BELLA submarine cable to connect research centers, and a summit on e-governance, digital governance, and AI in Costa Rica in mid-May to which the OCTs are invited.
- **The fight against the scourge of sargassum**, considered a "major problem" by the EU and Caribbean countries. Following conferences in 2019, 2023, and during COP28, a new regional meeting is scheduled for October in Grenada to coordinate research, harvesting, storage, and possible economic valorization of this invasive algae.

- **Sustainable maritime transport**, crucial for regional integration and the high cost of living on the islands. The EU is working with the EIB, the Caribbean Development Bank, and member states to identify solutions on this sensitive topic.

There is also "The 47th Regular Meeting of the Conference" during which Martinique will likely be officially accepted as an associate member of CARICOM.

**What are the challenges and projects for the EU in this area?**

A key moment has been the late-May conference in Antigua, SIDS 4, where we present with Caribbean ministers a new protocol that will establish the priorities and governance of our partnership with the Caribbean for the coming years. We are also working on advancing and financing numerous infrastructure, digital, and security programs as part of the Global Gateway in the region.

But ultimately, my main message is that to tackle the enormous regional challenges in areas like the environment (for example, combating sargassum) or transport, regional coordination is fundamental, as is the genuine political will of Caribbean countries to advance in a more in-depth and effective integration process. The EU remains always available to help the region face these enormous challenges.



# RICHÈS KARAYIB *Voices*

The challenge that reveals Caribbean Talents & Voices



## THE ALBUM IS COMING SOON

*Kamiah Classique*



*Juss Lizz*



*Awno*



*Samssounds*



*Soddi*



*Tziporah*



*Donaten Legend*



Interreg  
Caraïbes  
Fonds européen de développement régional



The project Richès KARAYIB is co-financed by the INTERREG CARIBBEAN program through the European Regional Economic Development Fund



## REGIONAL COOPERATION PROJECTS

In this special issue, we highlight regional **cooperation initiatives that are turning challenges into opportunities across the Caribbean**. The projects presented here illustrate the commitment of various stakeholders in the region to promoting sustainable and inclusive development. Each endeavor aims to leverage local resources, protect the environment, and strengthen ties between Caribbean communities. Before exploring some innovative projects that contribute to building a prosperous and resilient future for the Caribbean, we will take a closer look at the **INTERREG-CARIBBEAN program, its regulatory framework, and its operational mechanisms**.



### AVEC SEL ET PIMENT



ORIGINS OF CARIBBEAN AND AMAZONIAN  
CUISINES - ACT 2:  
PROMOTING LOCAL DELICACIES AND  
CULINARY HERITAGE



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### LA MAISON DU BÈLÈ - KAY BÈLÈ-A



PROMOTING BÈLÈ BEYOND BORDERS:  
PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION OF  
CULTURAL HERITAGE

<https://www.lamaisondubele.fr/la-maison-du-bele>



# INTERREG-CARIBBEAN: A major tool for Regional Cooperation in the Caribbean

The INTERREG-CARIBBEAN program is a European initiative designed to promote regional cooperation and sustainable development in the Caribbean. It aims to integrate the French outermost regions more effectively into their regional environment and strengthen cooperation with regional international organizations in the Caribbean.

Launched by the European Union in 1990, the INTERREG-CARIBBEAN initiative **encourages cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation within the EU**. This program includes European overseas territories in the Caribbean to foster closer ties with neighboring Caribbean countries. It is funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as part of the EU's cohesion policy.

This program enables public and private entities from Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Saint-Martin to implement projects with their Caribbean neighbors, through a collaboration with regional international organizations, such as the Association of Caribbean States, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, and CARIFORUM.

Since its launch, the INTERREG CARIBBEAN program has significantly impacted the Caribbean region. More than 100 projects have been funded, spanning various sectors including health, major risk management, education, environment, digital economy, maritime and air connectivity, and culture. These projects have resulted in the creation of hundreds of jobs, improved critical infrastructure, and strengthened local institutional capacities.



For the 2021-2027 period, the program continues to evolve by incorporating new priorities such as digital transition and climate change adaptation. Partnerships are being strengthened to maximize the impact of projects and ensure more effective cooperation among stakeholders. The program has a budget of €61.65 million, with the ERDF covering up to 85% of eligible project expenses.

There are two types of partners: **Community and Extra-Community**.

Only lead partners and community partners are eligible for ERDF funding to reimburse expenses incurred. Project partners must be located within the cooperation area. However, in duly justified cases, organizations located outside the cooperation area can take part in projects if the benefit for the region within the cooperation area is clearly demonstrated.

It is possible for some partners located outside the EU to apply for another financial tool: the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), which replaces the European Development Fund (EDF) within the scope of INTERREG Caribbean to co-finance their activities.



## REGIONAL COOPERATION PROJECTS

The INTERREG-CARIBBEAN 2021-2027 program has established six priorities:

- Priority 1: A smarter, more innovative and more competitive Caribbean
- Priority 2: A Greener Caribbean
- Priority 3: A more connected Caribbean
- Priority 4: A more social and inclusive Caribbean
- Priority 5: For enhanced cross-border cooperation between Saint-Martin and Sint-Maarten
- Priority 6: For facilitating and optimising cooperation in the Caribbean

The submission guidelines for projects:

1- Call for Expressions of Interest (CEI): The first call for projects closed on April 15, 2024.

2- Rolling Submission: This allows for continuous submission of complete application files throughout the program duration.

These submissions are reviewed by the Joint Secretariat and presented to the Selection Committee for approval.

**INTERREG-CARIBBEAN is implemented through a partnership-based governance model:** It is managed by the Guadeloupe local Authority, which serves as the managing authority, in conjunction with community partners (CTM - Collectivité Territoriale de Martinique, CTG - Collectivité Territoriale de Guyane, CS-M - Saint-Martin, and the European Commission) and non-community partners (Association of Caribbean States, Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, CARIFORUM).

**A Steering Committee responsible for the selection of operations** is composed of full members and observer members. The full members make decisions regarding the programming, rejection, deferral, modification, and/or deprogramming of projects proposed on the agenda. Observer members contribute observations during discussions but do not participate in decision-making. **A Monitoring Committee ensures the strategic management of the program.**

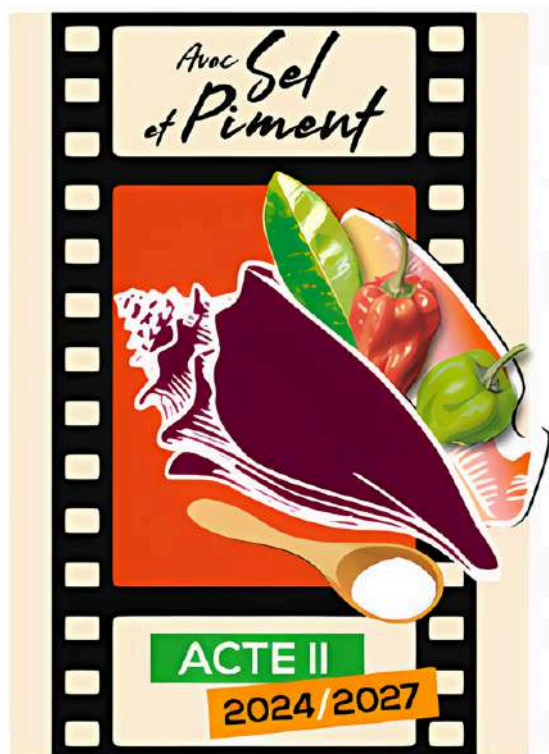
**A Joint Secretariat based in Guadeloupe, composed of permanent staff,** handles the administrative and financial management and animation of the program. It liaises with regional contact points located in six countries, with the Martinique contact point located at the Martinique Territorial Collectivity Hotel. A reorganization of the Joint Secretariat is underway, focusing on both work organization and human resources, with the recruitment of new staff. This reorganization aims to optimize support for project leaders, particularly by facilitating their search for institutional partners outside the EU and improving access to media in the concerned countries to enhance project communication. Project leaders also expect the managing authority to significantly shorten the reimbursement delays for incurred expenses. It is important to remember that the principle governing European funds is that beneficiaries are reimbursed for eligible expenses after strict verification.



On April 25, 2024, the Region of Guadeloupe and the AFD signed a declaration of intent for a partnership, as part of the coordination of EDF-ERDF implemented by the INTERREG-CARIBBEAN program. Patrick SELLIN, president of the regional integration and European affairs commission of the Region of Guadeloupe, along with Charles TROTTMANN, head of the Three Oceans department at AFD.

Finally, regarding the crucial issue of financing, it is also desirable that banks provide more support to project leaders in the implementation of their projects by setting up appropriate cash flow financing. On this last point, it is worth noting the initiative taken earlier this year by the AFD with the support of the CTM, which brought together all bank managers in Martinique to inform them about the financial and regulatory realities of the INTERREG program and the guarantees they could expect.

# AVEC SEL ET PIMENT: Origins of Caribbean and Amazonian Cuisines - Act 2



## Philosophical Intent of the Project

The cuisines and gastronomies of the Caribbean — themselves part of the Americas — represent an exceptional patrimonial and matrimonial wealth. Throughout history, men and women have shaped various aspects of our culinary world. However, it is the women who have ensured, under the most challenging conditions, the most crucial creative contributions on a daily basis. This matri-patrimony remains largely unrecognized.

There exists a common culinary fabric that unites all the countries of the Caribbean and French Guiana. This forms a cultural matrix whose unity can only be perceived through its convergences, repetitions, and invariants.

Understanding our culinary arts through their historical constants, practices, and diverse knowledge, and ensuring their professionalization, economic development, and transmission on scientific and aesthetic bases, is at the core of this project.

The “AVEC SEL ET PIMENT” project explores and showcases the culinary riches of the Caribbean and Amazonia. Driven by KREYOLIMAGES, this project highlights the unique culinary heritage of these regions and aims to enhance the knowledge, professionalization, and transmission of local culinary traditions.

Following a successful Act 1, which unveiled and documented the ancestral culinary traditions of the Caribbean and Amazonia's earliest inhabitants, "With Salt and Pepper" is set to launch Act 2, aiming to deepen and disseminate this knowledge.



## KEY ACTIONS FOR THE 2024/2027 PERIOD (Submitted under the INTERREG-CARIBBEAN CFP)

**4 Documentary Films:** A documentary series “With Salt and Pepper – Act 2” consisting of four 52-minute episodes, filmed in the French West Indies - French Guiana, Dominica, and Saint Lucia, covering the following themes:

- The cuisine of the Amerindians
- The cuisine of the discoverers and buccaneers
- The cuisine of Father Labat
- The cuisine of the slave ships
- The cuisine of the plantations
- The cuisine of the port cities



## REGIONAL COOPERATION PROJECTS

This comprehensive documentary series will be broadcast on the France Télévisions networks as well as all overseas television stations - the lères. These broadcasts will also take place in the Caribbean and Amazonian regions with subtitled versions (English and Spanish).

- **INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIA:** Exploration of the origins, evolutions, and perspectives of the cuisines of the Caribbean and the Americas.
- **UNESCO APPLICATION FOR THE RECOGNITION OF CARIBBEAN CUISINES AS INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE.** The OECS will be associated with this initiative.
- **MASTERCLASSES AND SHOW COOKING:** Sessions to promote chefs and cuisines from the Caribbean and Guiana Shield that are still little known in their own region, as well as in the Americas and Europe.
- **CODIFICATION OF CARIBBEAN CUISINES:** Initiatives to document and transmit traditional recipes.
- **CREATION OF AN INNOVATIVE PLATFORM, A DIGITAL HUB:** Dedicated to promoting the cuisines of the Caribbean and the Guianas worldwide.
- **TRAINING PROGRAMS:** To train chefs and culinary professionals.

### CONCERNED COUNTRIES

Antigua, Barbados, Colombia, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Dominican Republic, Saint Lucia, Saint Martin, Saint Vincent...

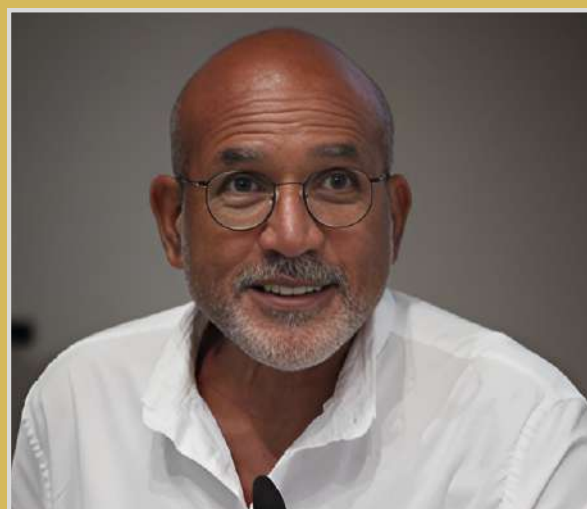
### PROJECT LEADERS



#### GUY DESLAURIERS

As the manager of KREYOLIMAGES, he has produced several documentaries for television.

His films (The Exile of King Béhanzin, Passage of the Middle, Biguine, Alier) selected at many international festivals have earned the director international recognition.





#### PATRICK CHAMOISEAU

Poet, novelist, essayist, he has built a multifaceted body of work that has been crowned with numerous distinctions and translated worldwide.

#### CONTACT:

Cell: +33 (0)6 77 04 82 80

Email: kreyolimages@outlook.fr

  **Guy Deslauriers**

## **CARIBSAN: An innovative collaboration for sustainable wastewater in the Caribbean**

The CARIBSAN project, led by the Office of Water Martinique (ODE), is a Caribbean cooperation initiative involving five territories: Cuba, Saint Lucia, Dominica, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. This project aims to build wastewater treatment plants using planted filter beds, an innovative technique developed in Martinique. After a successful first phase, CARIBSAN is now entering its second operational phase, which is expected to last three and a half years and will benefit from substantial funding from the INTERREG-CARIBBEAN program.

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### **MEETING WITH MICHELA ADIN**

Michela ADIN, General Director of the Office of Water Martinique (ODE), participated in the 17th Caribbean Cooperation Conference. She shared her insights on the importance of this cooperation for Caribbean territories, especially in the water and sanitation sector. She also highlighted the CARIBSAN project, which is launching its second phase, expected to be funded over 50% by the INTERREG-CARIBBEAN program.

#### **What does the Caribbean Cooperation Conference represent for you?**

This is an annual event we greatly value. It's an opportunity to meet with all Caribbean partners, as well as local and national decision-makers. This year, I particularly appreciated the presence of the Minister of Overseas Territories and local decision-makers, who are our primary contacts on the ground. We use these meetings to review the progress of our projects, the regulations on cooperation, and to address certain challenges.

#### **What is the significance of Caribbean cooperation for the Office of Water Martinique?**

Caribbean cooperation is very important to us. It allows us to develop technical and institutional exchanges with the Caribbean water stakeholders network.



We have contributions to make, and in return, we learn a lot from our neighbors. We share common issues and challenges related to water and sanitation. Cooperation helps us find solutions together for often similar problems.

These meetings allow us to participate in discussions, lobbying, and advocacy to ensure that cooperation is more flexible for our CFAs. We would like some decisions to be truly localized in our territories to move our files forward more easily. We, as administrators and technicians, need more facilitative work environments.



# CARIBSAN

## CARIBBEAN COOPERATION ON WASTEWATER TREATMENT INSPIRED BY NATURAL HERITAGE



**THE CARIBSAN PROJECT IS A  
CARIBBEAN SOLUTION FOR  
WASTEWATER TREATMENT USING  
PLANTED FILTERS**

**INSUFFICIENT WASTEWATER TREATMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN THREATS  
AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS, COASTLINES AND HUMAN HEALTH.**

The Planted Plant Filter (FPV) technique is a nature-based solution that couples the use of a local plant and a substrate to rid wastewater of the main pollutants.



### 3 OBJECTIVES

- Studies to identify suitable sites and plant species
- Training for wastewater operators
- Dissemination of results in the Caribbean



**1,7 MILLION € including  
1.1 MILLION BY THE ERDF FUND  
JUNE 2021-DECEMBER 2022**

TO FIND OUT MORE  
[WWW.CARIBSAN.EU](http://WWW.CARIBSAN.EU) -  CARIBSAN 

The CARIBSAN project is co-financed by the INTERREG Caribbean program under the European Regional Development Fund, by the French Development Agency as well as the Martinique and Guadeloupe Water Offices.



### **Could you provide an overview of the renewed Interreg CARIBSAN project?**

The CARIBSAN project, led by ODE Martinique, is a Caribbean cooperation initiative involving five territories: Cuba, Saint Lucia, Dominica, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. The project aims to build wastewater treatment plants using vegetated filter beds in the partner territories. The first phase concluded on December 31, 2023, during which studies, meetings, and training sessions were conducted to familiarize our partners with this technique developed in Martinique.

We are now entering a more operational phase of work, which began in January 2024 and will last for three and a half years. The project proposal has been submitted to the INTERREG-CARIBBEAN office, and we are awaiting the agreement signatures. We are optimistic, as this is a flagship project at the Interreg-Caribbean window, with a budget of 8 million euros for this second phase.

### **What challenges are you facing in implementing this project?**

The challenges we face are numerous. We must navigate legal constraints as standards vary from one territory to another, requiring adherence to each country's legislation.

There are logistical issues with travel within the region due to limited and expensive flight options.

We also face language barriers, working in French, English, and Spanish. Some visas are difficult to obtain.

Financially, we must ensure smooth fund transfers to beneficiary countries, considering the stringent conditions imposed by the Interreg framework on fund circulation, which are not always suitable.

Additionally, the centralization of the cooperation policy in France poses constraints, with decision-making powers not always localized. Active engagement in advocacy is crucial to ensure these policies can be effectively implemented in our regions.

### **How do you intend to address these challenges?**

We have established a dedicated project team comprising experts in various fields (legal, financial, technical, etc.). More than 30 technicians will be involved in the second phase of CARIBSAN. We are working closely with local, Caribbean, and national partners familiar with these cooperation issues, such as the AFD (French Development Agency), CTM, the Guadeloupe region, DCOM, and Caribbean embassies. Cooperation entails long-term efforts and sometimes complex casework, but these projects are truly exhilarating!

### **What are the expected benefits of this project for the relevant populations?**

The anticipated benefits are numerous. Firstly, improving access to sanitation in beneficiary countries is a fundamental right as defined by the UN.

Additionally, constructing facilities using nature-based, robust, and cost-effective techniques positions these populations to adapt to climate change. Their involvement is sought at every stage. Local technicians will also enhance their knowledge and skills. Ultimately, we are enriching broader cooperation with our Caribbean counterparts in a purely humanitarian manner, aiming for a win-win outcome.

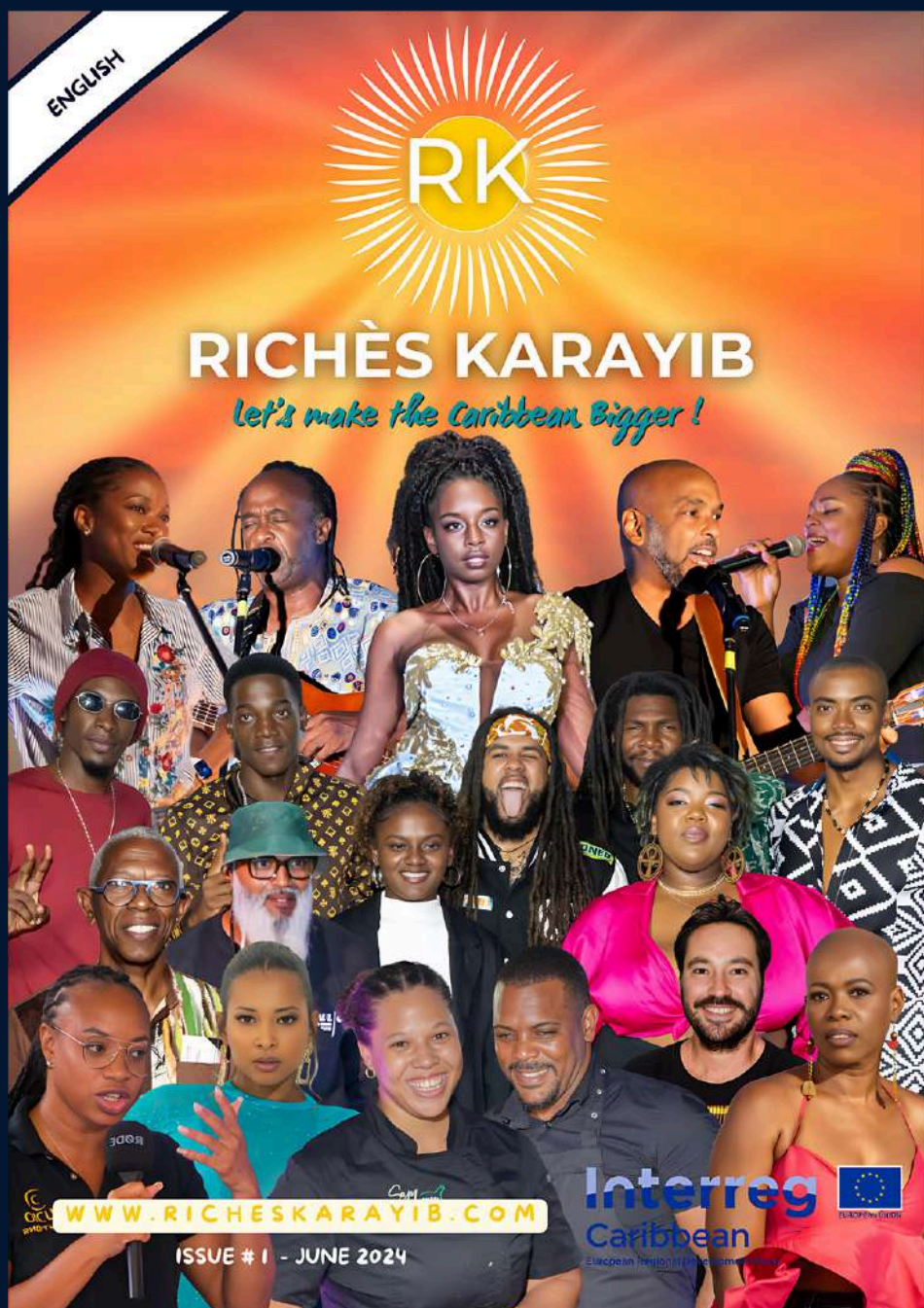




**RICHÈS KARAYIB**

*Let's make the Caribbean Bigger!*

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# RICHÈS KARAYIB: To Capitalize on Culture for economic development in the Caribbean

Richès Karayib is an innovative project with ambitious goals to enhance and promote the cultural richness and assets of the Caribbean territories, while also stimulating regional economic development.

Richès Karayib is not just a cultural project; it embodies a strategic vision for the future of the Caribbean. By focusing on strengthening regional unity and professionalizing cultural players, the project aims to create a dynamic and sustainable ecosystem. The Caribbean, rich in diversity and traditions, finds in this initiative a platform to express itself and thrive.

## MEETING WITH SABRINA AJAX

### Can you tell us about the inspiration behind Richès Karayib?

Richès Karayib was born out of a desire to bring together territories that are geographically close yet separated in reality. The idea emerged during the COVID-19 period, when we were all cut off from the world due to travel restrictions. This situation made us realize that despite our geographical proximity, we were facing a common issue that isolated us. However, new technologies allowed us to stay connected like never before.

I started by creating a blog page titled "Richès Karayib" on the ASIS WI website. The goal was to create regional unity by fostering a better mutual understanding of the various actors in the region.

To do this, we published articles to showcase the talents and local initiatives of each territory. This helped us lay the foundation for a dynamic and interconnected Caribbean community. Initially, the project was open to various sectors, but with the INTERREG-CARIBBEAN program, we chose to focus on culture, which proved to be the most obvious and important sector for creating connections.



### What are the main objectives and mission of Richès Karayib?

The primary mission of Richès Karayib is to highlight Caribbean culture and create a dynamic, interconnected ecosystem that supports regional economic development. Our objectives are multifaceted:

- **Strengthening Regional Unity:** Bringing Caribbean territories closer together by creating cultural and economic bridges through exchanges and collaborations between cultural actors.
- **Professionalizing Cultural Stakeholders:** Offering training and mentorship programs to develop the skills of artists, artisans, and cultural entrepreneurs and improve their international visibility.



## REGIONAL COOPERATION PROJECTS

- **International Promotion of Caribbean Culture:** Showcasing the Caribbean's cultural richness through events, publications, and digital platforms, including music, dance, gastronomy, crafts, and other cultural expressions.
- **Sustainable Economic Development:** Stimulating the cultural sector to create economic opportunities, supporting the creation of cultural enterprises, and promoting territories to enhance their attractiveness, while ensuring the authenticity and sustainability of local practices.



We aim to unite the Caribbean, facilitate access to professionals and activities, stimulate a cultural dynamic, and encourage everyone's participation. This expansion aims to create sustainable economic opportunities and enhance the attractiveness of Caribbean territories, while promoting and preserving their rich cultural heritage.

### What is the impact of Richès Karayib on local economies?

Through our actions, we aim to impact the local economy by:

1. **Stimulating cultural industries:** Annual itinerant events around music, gastronomy, fashion, and cinema create economic opportunities for local artists and entrepreneurs.
2. **Creating sustainable economic opportunities:** Our activities attract visitors and investors, generating income for residents.
3. **Enhancing the attractiveness of territories:** By showcasing the Caribbean's cultural richness, we attract more tourists and investments.
4. **Boosting the cultural ecosystem:** Through our digital platform and magazine, we offer increased visibility to cultural stakeholders and facilitate exchanges between professionals and enthusiasts in the region.

### And a final word?

Richès Karayib is more than a project; it is a movement for unity and the celebration of our rich cultural heritage. It is a capitalization on our wealth. We invite all cultural actors, enthusiasts, and potential partners to join us in this adventure to make the Caribbean shine on the world stage. **Let's continue to write our history, enrich our present, and build our future Together.**

### What are the main challenges you have faced?

For a large-scale project to be successful, it is crucial to have solid pre-financing and complementary funding to cover all phases of implementation. This involves finding sponsors or patrons to support our initiatives. The lack of financial resources has sometimes limited our ability to organize events, promote our activities, and support cultural actors. In addition to financial challenges, we have also faced constraints in terms of human resources. Coordinating such a project requires a dedicated and qualified team, capable of managing various aspects of the project, from logistics to communication, and managing relationships with partners and participants. Otherwise, it makes for very short nights!

### What are your future plans for Richès Karayib?

After a year rich in celebrations with eight cultural events in seven islands, a Caribbean singing challenge, a magazine, and a digital platform, ASIS WI, in partnership with Sa Kai Malade Karaib (Dominica) and Antigua Viva (Guatemala), aims to continue and amplify the impact of Richès Karayib with a clear strategy until 2027. One of our main activities will be the annual organization of itinerant events around four cultural categories: music, gastronomy, fashion, and cinema, thus strengthening our cultural footprint in the region.

# LA MAISON DU BÈLÈ - *KAY BÈLÈ-A*: Promoting Bèlè beyond borders

La Maison du Bèlè, led by Isabelle Florenty, is a cornerstone of preserving and promoting the Bèlè culture in Sainte-Marie, Martinique. Founded in 2003 by Dalila Daniel, this organization has been a rich and varied space for cultural transmission for over 20 years. In this interview, Ms. Isabelle Florenty reveals the multifaceted nature of La Maison du Bèlè, its ambitious projects, and its central role in promoting Martinican and Caribbean heritage.

## MEETING WITH ISABELLE FLORENTY

### What are the main objectives of La Maison du Bèlè?

La Maison du Bèlè - *Kay Bèlè-a* (in creole) focuses on researching, preserving, transmitting, promoting, and creating Bèlè, an intangible cultural heritage of Martinique and the Caribbean. Our activities span all levels and scales deemed relevant, including identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission (through formal and non-formal education), and revitalization of various aspects, while supporting creation within this cultural expression.

### Can you tell us about your current agenda and daily activities?

We are open daily from 8 am to 1 pm and 2 pm to 4 pm. La Maison du Bèlè - *Kay Bèlè-a* serves multiple functions:

- A resource center on Bèlè from Martinique and the Caribbean, where knowledge about Bèlè is lived and transmitted.
- An exhibition and expression space for Bèlè, accessible to everyone (children, students, adults, residents, and tourists).
- A place for making drums and related items, as well as artistic creations (hosting residencies, supporting creation, programming, etc.).



### How would you describe the impact of the Maison du Bèlè on the local and regional community?

Bèlè, to me, transcends mere dance and music. It embodies our culture and daily way of life in Martinique. It represents mutual aid, respect for elders, and the deep humility that characterizes our society. The Maison du Bèlè plays a crucial role in passing these values on to younger generations, welcoming children as young as four to introduce them to this living culture.

### How does La Maison du Bèlè contribute to educating and raising awareness among young generations about Bèlè culture?

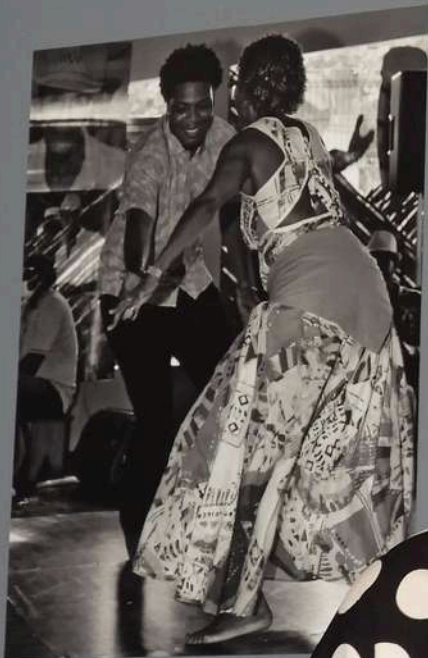
La Maison du Bèlè plays a vital role in educating and raising awareness among young generations through several key initiatives. It provides regular dance and drum workshops tailored for children from the age of 4 and teenagers, providing practical immersion in this tradition. Educational programs are also integrated into schools, where La Maison du Bèlè instructors teach the history, values, and practice of Bèlè.



# Bèlè Sentmari

## Le bèlè qui se danse à Sainte-Marie

que nous appellerons  
ici bèlè Sentmari, est celui qui est le plus  
connu à la Martinique et aussi celui qui est  
le plus souvent représenté par les groupes  
de danse. Il se danse à l'extérieur de  
l'île. L'origine de cette tradition  
l'ont été, à l'origine, à danser  
ou en compagnie d'un  
par un oncle, tante,  
grand-père, longtemps  
pratiquée par les  
Sainte-Marie, Perou, Reculée,  
Fonds-Saint, mêmes  
esprits, traditions



**Here,** w  
is produc  
Sentmari  
in Martin  
bearers o  
their anc  
play, dan  
(mother,  
long peri  
like Beza  
Jacques  
was the  
accordin  
Dessales  
two hun

**"Bèlè is:**

**our culture, our way of life,  
mutual aid, and deep humanity."**

## REGIONAL COOPERATION PROJECTS

Furthermore, events and gatherings are arranged to immerse individuals in this cultural heritage, providing youth with the opportunity to see and participate in it.

La Maison du Bèlè also develops educational materials, such as booklets and videos, to facilitate the learning and transmission of this tradition.

Finally, it encourages intergenerational exchanges by inviting Bèlè Masters to share their expertise and experiences with the youth.

La Maison du Bèlè, which I passionately lead, is a place of life and transmission, where the soul of Martinique is perpetuated through its traditions and innovations.

***“We have established a pan-Caribbean Bèlè network to continue pursuing common projects together.”***



**Can you tell us about your international collaborations, specifically in the Caribbean area.**

Since 2012, we have undertaken several INTERREG-CARIBBEAN projects, initially aiming to explore popular dances and music of the Caribbean. We have collaborated with countries like Puerto Rico, Cuba, Saint Lucia, Dominica, Guadeloupe, and French-Guiana through artist residencies. We have researched the differences and similarities between our popular dances and music. We have produced an educational DVD to transmit Bèlè beyond Martinique's borders.

**What are the future projects of La Maison du Bèlè?**

We have several ongoing projects, including educational exchanges with the University of Trinidad.

We also aim to develop artistic creation based on Bèlè elements, collaborating with choreographers and artists to produce innovative shows. We continue to enrich our cultural database to allow our professionals to draw resources and create new works while respecting the tradition.

**La Maison du Bèlè welcomes visitors from all over the Caribbean. Can you tell us about the different forms of Bèlè found in neighboring islands?**

Bèlè is a practice of traditional music and dance in Martinique and several Caribbean countries. Its origins date back to the slavery period. In Martinique, Bèlè is both a percussion music, a series of dances, and a musical instrument.



## REGIONAL COOPERATION PROJECTS

The lyrics are always in Creole. In other Caribbean countries, Bèlè can take various forms: a danced fight in Jamaica, a verbal joust in Guadeloupe, or dance sequences set to drum music in Grenada, Trinidad, Dominica, and Saint Lucia. Since 2016, in collaboration with ethnomusicologist Dominique Cyrille as well as tradition bearers and scientists from Caribbean countries, we have been working on the origins and history of Bèlè in these countries. Nine countries have collaborated on this project. Thus, we have established a pan-Caribbean Bèlè network to continue pursuing common projects together.

### **What have been the impacts of these projects on La Maison du Bèlè and the perception of Bèlè culture in Martinique and beyond?**

These projects have had a significant impact. They have allowed Bèlè to transcend its local context in Sainte-Marie, presenting it as a living and dynamic tradition of the entire Caribbean. For example, the INTERREG-CARIBBEAN project from 2012-2015, titled "A Space for Expression and Promotion of Popular Caribbean Cultures," strengthened ties with our Caribbean neighbors.

These initiatives have reinforced our role as a center for Bèlè culture, both in Martinique and regionally. Additionally, they have contributed to greater recognition and appreciation of Bèlè internationally, highlighting its cultural importance and encouraging intercultural exchanges. These efforts have also attracted new audiences and fostered a more dynamic transmission of this tradition to younger generations, thereby consolidating the preservation and evolution of Bèlè in a contemporary context.

### **Can you give us concrete examples of recent collaborations with artists and institutions from the Caribbean?**

The bèlè of the Caribbean: One history, one connection, and one name: **BÈLÈ**. A future collaboration with the University of Trinidad for educational exchanges, allowing our respective dance and drum instructors to travel and teach.

Projects with artists from Saint Lucia, as well as reciprocal residencies.

***"We recently signed a charter with several Caribbean countries to formalize our collaboration."***

This charter aims to facilitate cultural exchanges, research, and the preservation of Bèlè across the region. Additionally, we have launched the first digital platform for Caribbean Bèlè.

### **What are the next steps for La Maison du Bèlè in terms of development and expansion?**

We plan to continue our INTERREG-CARIBBEAN projects and strengthen our pan-Caribbean Bèlè network. Furthermore, We are engaged in artistic projects inspired by Bèlè elements to provide a modern outlook while honoring heritage.

We also want to enrich our educational offerings with innovative tools such as interactive applications and online classes.

In addition to these initiatives, we intend to broaden our infrastructure to host more artists in residence and host larger-scale cultural events.

We also aim to strengthen our collaborations with international cultural and educational institutions to foster enriching intercultural exchanges.

Another development axis is to promote academic research on Bèlè through partnerships with universities and researchers, as well as disseminating studies and works on this cultural heritage.

Finally, we want to launch mentorship programs for emerging local artists, providing them with avenues for career advancement and exposure within the regional and global art community.

# Outcomes of the 17th French West Indies - French Guiana Regional Cooperation Conference

The 17th French West Indies - French Guiana Regional Cooperation Conference (CCRAg), held from April 23-25, 2024, in Saint-Martin, marked a significant milestone in strengthening the relations between the French Caribbean Territories and their Caribbean neighbors. Chaired by, Mrs. Marie Guévenoux, the Minister Delegate for Overseas Territories, the event brought together Presidents of Local Authorities, Parliamentarians, Prefects, Ambassadors, and public and private sector stakeholders to draw up joint recommendations.

## A JOINT POLITICAL DECLARATION

A joint political declaration was adopted to enhance regional integration and cooperation. Key steps include the ongoing membership processes of Martinique and French-Guiana to CARICOM as associate members, and Saint-Martin's membership to the OECS.

## KEY SIGNATURES

During the conference, several important agreements were signed:

- Declaration of Intent between AFD and CARICOM: To increase cooperation between the French Development Agency and the Caribbean Community.
- Declaration of Intent between AFD and the Guadeloupe Region: To support the region in managing European funds.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The CCRAg's work resulted in several significant recommendations, organized into four thematic sessions:

### Geopolitics and Regional Integration:

- Launching a study on the strategic challenges of the Caribbean and the Guiana Shield for the next twenty years.
- Continuing state support for the French Caribbean Territories's accession to CARICOM.
- Facilitating visa acquisition for citizens of the region.

### Global Security:

- Including the fight against criminal trafficking in a strengthened regional perspective.
- Continuing the international initiative on sargassum.
- Rapid signing of the France-CDEMA agreement on natural disaster management.

### Exports:

- Strengthening support mechanisms for exports in the territories and abroad.
- Developing a common state-collectivity strategy to support exports from overseas companies.
- Reforming freight assistance in collaboration with the European Union.

### Culture and Francophonie:

- Optimizing the use of tools that promote artist mobility in the Caribbean and the Guiana Shield
- Promoting Francophonie while respecting the multilingual and multicultural context of the region.

## TOWARDS A COMMON FUTURE

The conference, enriched by two parallel events, one focused on Caribbean cooperation for climate and sustainable development, and the other aimed at facilitating exchanges between ambassadors and entrepreneurs, highlighted the commitment of regional stakeholders to turn challenges into opportunities.

The conference was a true success, laying the groundwork for strengthened cooperation and increased integration in the region. Ambassador Roland Dubertrand, in charge of regional cooperation in the Atlantic zone, will oversee the implementation of the conference's recommendations, with a progress review scheduled for October 2024. This dynamic promises to strengthen ties between Caribbean territories and open up new prospects for a prosperous and resilient future.



