

:: New York, 25 Eylül 2006

Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,

I am very pleased to have this rare opportunity to meet collectively with my distinguished colleagues from the Caribbean. For this, I am particularly grateful to His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Grenada for his kind invitation and hospitality.

Dear colleagues,

At first glance, we may seem geographically far apart from each other. However, this distance is bridged first of all by the many common interests, issues and concerns that we share. Turkey is, in one way, a middle-income developing country. Consequently, we are receptive as well as susceptible to many of the problems faced by the developing world. With similar experiences, we have much common ground to build closer economic relations, particularly in the context of South-South cooperation.

The desire to promote and diversify our relations with the Central and Latin American as well as the Caribbean states is thus an important component of our foreign policy. Indeed, the Action Plan we have been implementing over recent years to further develop commercial and cultural ties with the Americas is a testimony of this desire and determination. In addition to economic and cultural cooperation, we also seek to enhance our political dialogue.

To this end, we have designated 2006 as “the Year of the Americas”. Although we still have more than three months to go in 2006, our decision has already started yielding results.

First of all, it has given a higher visibility to the Americas in my country. It has thus raised greater interest to do business with the region. Furthermore, the cultural and social contacts have increased leading to a better mutual understanding among our peoples. In this regard, the Latin American and Caribbean weeks organized both in Ankara and Istanbul this year brought together different sectors with an interest in advancing our relations.

Based on this most positive and promising experience, we are determined to continue to explore further avenues of cooperation to the benefit of all. Indeed, I am confident that the launch of the “Year of the Americas” will continue to have an impact in the years ahead as we hopefully reap together its rewards of increased cooperation.

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Dear colleagues,

In essence, the Action Plan I refer to covers the whole Americas and the countries of the Caribbean have a special place in this respect. I hope my presence here today attests to this fact and helps build even closer relations between our countries.

On the other hand, our interest in the issues of concern for the Americas also finds its expression in our participation as an observer in such regional organizations as the CARICOM, the Organization of American States and the Association of Caribbean States.

I also strongly believe that reciprocal high level contacts are most useful too. Therefore, I hope you will all take up my invitation to visit Turkey where we may exchange views on bilateral as well as regional and international topics of common concern. In so doing, I also wish you to a have a first hand experience of Turkey.

Home to many cultures and religions throughout history, Turkey today is rightly called as a cradle of civilizations. Thus, I am sure that the rich Caribbean culture will find in Turkey a resourceful environment to blend.

Distinguished colleagues,

Before concluding, allow me to say a few words on how we see issues related to development, which I am sure hold a very high place in your agenda.

In our opinion, internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals cannot be attained without a global

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partnership. Turkey is thus committed to doing its share in this respect, and more particularly in addressing the needs of the least developed and developing countries.

It is with this understanding that Turkey allocated some 235 million US Dollars to humanitarian causes in 2005. Coupled with the development assistance rendered by Turkey during the past year, this figure exceeds 600 million US Dollars. In this context, Turkey also pledged 100 thousand US Dollars of aid to Haiti.

Dear colleagues,

Turkey is located in an earthquake-prone region and unfortunately knows only too well the true meaning of natural disasters. That is why it will always be among the first in responding to humanitarian emergencies.

This solidarity finds its expression in Turkey's decision to make a contribution of 400 thousand US Dollars to the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA). We will continue to further contribute to the global security and development agenda and heed the urgent call of humanitarian emergencies.

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Thank you very much for your kind attention.