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Caribbean Community Summit: Leaders Call For More Progress In Forming Common Market

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On July 3, heads of state and government from the 13 member nations of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) commenced a week-long summit in St. George's, Grenada. CARICOM member nations are Antigua-Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent-Grenadines and Trinidad & Tobago. The Dominican Republic, Haiti and Suriname have observer status. On July 2, CARICOM secretary general Roderick Rainford told reporters that the concrete goal of the 10th Caricom summit is "to make further, measurable improvements in growth and cooperation, and other fields," such as the fight against drug trafficking, and establishment of a Caribbean appeals court. Included on the agenda is discussion the political situations in Panama and Haiti and Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley's proposal to form a multi-national police force to fight drug trafficking in the region. A CARICOM team visited Haiti recently at the invitation of Gen. Prosper Avril's government, and is expected to present its report to the summit. Manley's proposal was unanimously approved June 29 by the US House of Representatives. In statements over the weekend, Bahamas Prime Minister Lynden Pindling called for Panamanian Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega to resign as commander-in-chief of the Defense Forces. He also called on the US to terminate all economic sanctions against Panama since "it is unreasonable to expect the political landscape of Panama to return to normalcy if the economic waterfront remains in turmoil." On July 3, Prime Minister Manley urged CARICOM to integrate into a single market to better negotiate foreign debt repayment. Jamaica leads the region's per capita debt at $4.5 billion. Manley said Caribbean countries should engage in more intra-regional trade, harmonizing import tariffs, clarifying rules of origin for CARICOM goods and establishing a Caribbean stock market. Guyana President Desmond Hoyte declared, "We either integrate or perish...We can not relax our efforts. We cannot stand still while the rest of the world advances." According to Hoyte, regional trade has improved but has not yet been sufficient to make CARICOM into a single market. Grenada's Prime Minister Herbert Blaize urged CARICOM to follow the example of the European Economic Community and the US-Canada free trade agreement in developing closer economic ties and "yielding nationalism to internationalism." According to a Caricom Secretariat report, intra-regional trade increased 14.6% in 1988 to $378 million, while non-petroleum trade rose by 28.6%. The economies of the 13 CARICOM members which cover 271,000 sq.km. with a total population of about 5.5 million, are largely dependent on tourism, bananas and sugar. At the summit last year in Antigua CARICOM leaders agreed to dismantle all barriers to intra-regional trade by October 1988. Progress has been rather slow. According to a CARICOM secretariat report, intra-regional trade in 1988 totaled a record $378 million, up 14.6% from the 1987 figure, and equal to 8.2% of total imports relative to 7.8% the previous year. (Basic data from various report by AFP, 07/02/89, 07/03/89)

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