

HONOURABLE MINISTERS,

HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF THE SURINAME NATIONAL ASSEMBLY,

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

FIRST AND FOREMOST, I BID YOU ALL A HEARTY WELCOME, NOTABLY OUR GUESTS FROM ABROAD. I WISH YOU A WONDERFUL STAY IN OUR COUNTRY, AND I HOPE YOU WILL AVAIL YOURSELF OF OUR SURINAMESE HOSPITALITY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

THIS MEETING TAKES PLACE IN A CRUCIAL HISTORICAL PERIOD IN THE REGION IN WHICH NEW INTEGRATION TRENDS AND SYNERGIES HAVE BEEN CREATED BY THE FOUNDATION OF THE CELAC, WHICH HELD ITS FIRST SUMMIT MEETING IN SANTIAGO DE CHILE IN JANUARY 2013. SURINAME VERY MUCH APPRECIATE THE FACT THAT IT IS THE FIRST TIME A MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THIS FORUM OF MINISTERS OF CULTURE, THE OLDEST CULTURAL FORUM IN THE REGION, IS HELD IN OUR COUNTRY.

WE WOULD LIKE TO PAY TRIBUTE TO UNESCO FOR ITS SUPPORT TO THE FORUM OF MINISTER OF CULTURE SINCE ITS FOUNDATION, PARTICULARLY THROUGH THE UNESCO REGIONAL OFFICE FOR CULTURE, WHICH HAS BEEN THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT OF THE FORUM SINCE 1999, AT THE REQUEST OF THE LATIN AMERICAN AND THE CARIBBEAN MEMBER STATES.

IT IS GRATIFYING TO NOTE THAT THE THEME OF CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN CONSPICUOUS IN ALL THE PREVIOUS EIGHTEEN FORUMS OF MINISTERS, WHICH TESTIFIES HOW MUCH IMPORTANCE THE STATES IN THE REGION ATTACH TO THIS ISSUE. HOWEVER, THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRISIS PLACES FRESH CHALLENGES FOR OUR COUNTRIES MAKING IT

MORE OBLIGATORY TO HAVE CULTURE INCLUDED AS A PILLAR OF DEVELOPMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA, TOGETHER WITH THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES OF DEVELOPMENT.

I WOULD EXPRESS THE HOPE THAT THROUGHOUT THIS CONFERENCE WE WILL ALL WORK IN UNISON AND REALIZE THE EXPECTATIONS THAT THE FORUM AND THE CELAC HAVE PLACED UPON US.

ON ANOTHER NOTE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE WOULD LIKE TO INVITE ALL THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN MEMBER STATES TO JOIN US AS WE WILL BE HOSTING THE XI CARIBBEAN FESTIVAL OF ARTS (CARIFESTA) IN AUGUST 2013 IN PARAMARIBO. CARIFESTA IS THE GREATEST CULTURAL FESTIVAL OF THE REGION FOR CARIBBEAN CULTURAL EXPRESSION. IT OFFERS AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF THE REGION.

I WISH YOU ALL A FRUITFUL CONFERENCE