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CHA REACTS TO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN EPA NEGOTIATIONS

Bridgetown, BARBADOS (September 28, 2007) – Responding to questions, Peter Odle, President of the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA), expressed the organization's extreme concern about the status of CARIFORUM-European Union negotiations towards the conclusion of an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and, more specifically, the status of negotiations on the topic of tourism. "The European Union's proposed 'Non-Paper' on Tourism is entirely inadequate and unacceptable," said Odle, adding that CHA encourages CARIFORUM's negotiators and all member states to continue to push for agreement on the CARIFORUM proposed tourism text, which has evolved out of the joint Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO)/CHA position paper submitted to the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM) towards the end of 2006. The issue was brought up before the CHA President at the Caribbean Small Hotels Retreat, being held in Barbados from the 26 to the 28th of September.

"Very generally, the CHA is dismayed that the EU is of the view that their one-page summarized document could adequately and fairly represent trading arrangements that will pertain between CARIFORUM and the EU for the leading economic sector in the CARIFORUM region," added Odle. "We understand that the EU has shown little interest in considering CARIFORUM's detailed and substantive proposal on tourism and we find this dismissive approach unproductive at the very least."

According to Peter Odle, EU's tourism proposal omits many critical elements proposed by CARIFORUM for the support of the tourism industry in a future trading agreement. He cited several examples of particulars that in CHA's view have been omitted in the EU "non-paper" versus the CARIFORUM proposed text, such as details on mechanisms to address and prevent anti-competitive practices in tourism between the EU and CARIFORUM; the chapter and details on market access for CARIFORUM tourism service providers to the EU; and details on mutual recognition of tourism professionals. The latter would mean that the credentials of CARIFORUM tourism professionals would be recognized in the EU.

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Other key elements were also omitted in relation to sustainable tourism development and technical assistance and development cooperation for the industry. Meanwhile, the entire proposal for a 'Joint Committee on Tourism' envisaged to guarantee ongoing dialogue between the EU and CARIFORUM on critical tourism related issues was completely excluded.

The CHA recognizes that the commitments made, or not made, in the EPA will form the foundation for tourism transactions between CARIFORUM member states and one of its largest tourism markets into the foreseeable future. "Given the significance of the tourism industry for regional development, and the significance of the EU tourism market, the CHA would like to see due recognition given to tourism and a substantive text agreed to in the EPA," concluded the President of CHA.

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The Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA) is dedicated to the advancement of tourism in the Caribbean region. It aims to be a regional forum that will advance the Caribbean hotel and tourism industry. The members of CHA represent the entire spectrum of hospitality industry's private sector, from 835 member hotels representing some 127,000 hotel rooms in 36 national hotel associations to allied members – airlines, tour operators, travel agents, trade and consumer press, hotel and restaurant suppliers, among many others - which account for 520 members. CHA is headquartered in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and maintains a promotion and marketing office in Miami, Florida.