

# Pact eases inter-island migration

**As part of a historic trade pact, the Caribbean Community decided to let more categories of workers move within it -- in part to discourage migration away from the region.**

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**BASSETERRE, St. Kitts** - Teachers and nurses will soon be allowed to move freely within the Caribbean Community as part of an effort to stop the flow of migration outside of the region and to expand the region's push of a regional trade agreement.

The decision to expand the categories of workers allowed to move freely as part of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy was agreed to Tuesday after leaders from the 15-nation regional bloc meeting here spent most of the day ironing out the details of the historic trade pact, which went into effect in January.

In addition, the CARICOM leaders agreed to establish close to a \$250 million regional fund to help provide technical and financial assistance to those nations and enterprises that may be put at a competitive disadvantage as a result of allowing the free trade of certain goods.

## 'FIRST STEP'

For instance, while CARICOM's six eastern Caribbean members officially entered the agreement Monday night, they have long expressed concerns that their economies and businesses could be put at a competitive disadvantage in the face of competition from Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad. "This the first step," Barbados Prime Minister Owen Arthur said, noting the fund will be put into operation immediately.

In addition, he said, a Caribbean Business Council will be soon created to help oversee the implementation of a single economy in the region. Leaders hope to have the framework for that set up by 2008.

Dominica Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerritt said leaders will also revisit suggestions to expand the group to let hospitality workers and artisans to move freely as well. Countries such as Trinidad and Tobago are in desperate need of labor to help its building boom.

Of the 15 members of CARICOM, three island-nations have not signed the pact allowing the CSME. The Bahamas has opted out, and Montserrat, a British dependent territory, still awaits permission from the United Kingdom.

## HAITI'S ROLE

Haiti, the region's largest market with eight million people, still must sign the treaty allowing it to enter the agreement in addition to passing laws removing barriers preventing the free movement of trade, and individuals.

"The terms of Haiti are still being fully negotiated," said Arthur, who is the spokesman for the CSME. Those terms will be discussed further today at a retreat in nearby Nevis.

Haitian President René Prével told The Miami Herald before coming here that he was ready to take advantage of the CSME, and he has invited a team of CARICOM technicians to visit the country in hopes of moving the process forward.

Still, even in lifting the barriers to allow nurses and teachers to join university graduates -- who are already allowed to move -- leaders concede that they face their toughest fight yet: convincing nationals that the pact will in the end help, not hurt, the Caribbean basin.

"Migration is a divisive issue," Arthur said. ``That is a very burning issue now; you only need to listen to CNN."