

Economic crisis, crime dominate CARICOM meeting

KINGSTON, Feb. 18 (Xinhua) -- The global economic crisis and high crime rates afflicting most member states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) dominated the group's meeting Monday in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, according to reports reaching here. "Since the financial and economic contagion of 2008, growth in this region has been strangled. Most of our member states contend on a daily basis with a fiscal situation that threatens to overwhelm them," said CARICOM General Secretary Irwin Larocque. "The circumstances which fashioned our approach to integration have changed, the nature of the challenges which we face has changed, our society has changed. Therefore, so must we," Larocque said at the opening session of the group's 24th Inter-sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government. He blamed CARICOM's economic challenges partly on what is viewed as the adverse policies of multilateral lending institutions. "The excruciating debt burden is exacerbated by the policies of the international financial institutions which disqualify many of our member states from concessionary financing because of criteria inappropriate to our circumstances," he said. "Those criteria are also being considered by other international development partners and, if adopted, could render our development efforts even more challenging," Larocque warned. Additionally, the CARICOM chief said rising crime rates in the region have become an obstacle to economic growth and stability. "Those financial and economic burdens are intensified by the growing levels of crime in our community, in particular the rise in gun-related violence," he said. Larocque announced that a meeting has been arranged with United States Attorney General Eric Holder to discuss the crime issue affecting the region with a view of forging a partnership to combat the problem. The CARICOM's intersessional meeting is being hosted by Haiti for the first time in the 40-year history of the group.