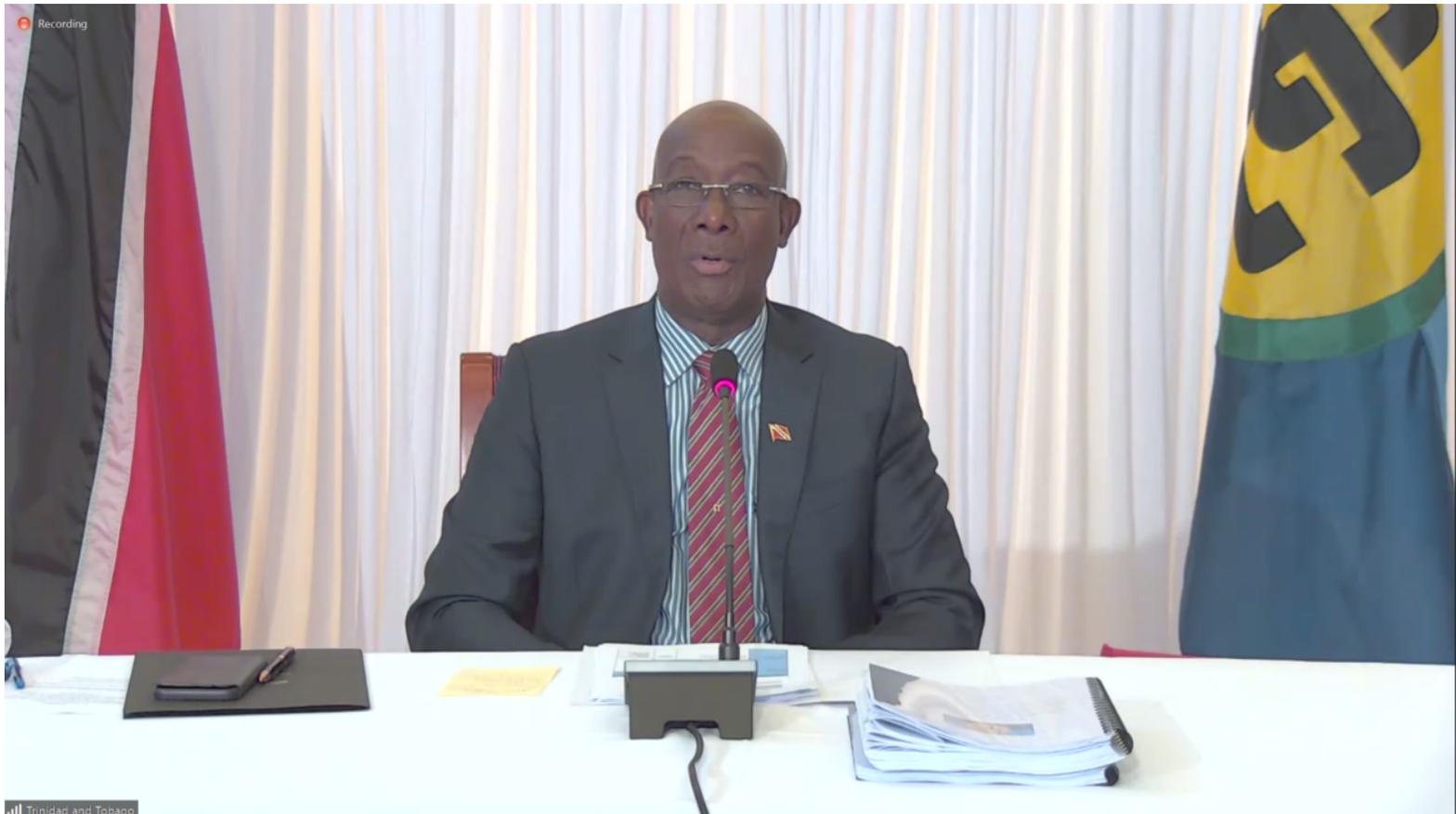


COMMUNIQUE – ISSUED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE THIRTY-SECOND INTER-SESSIONAL MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY

• FEBRUARY 25, 2021 🔥 15 📄 14 MINUTES READ



24-25 FEBRUARY 2021

The Thirty-Second Intersessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was held virtually on 24-25 February 2021. The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley chaired the proceedings.

Other Members of the Conference in attendance were: Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Honourable Gaston Browne; Prime Minister of Barbados, Honourable Mia Amor Mottley, Q.C; MP; Prime Minister of Belize, Honourable John Briceño; Prime Minister of Dominica, Honourable Roosevelt Skerrit; Prime Minister of Grenada, Dr. the Rt. Honourable Keith Mitchell; President of Guyana, His Excellency Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali; President of

Haiti, His Excellency Jovenel Moïse; Prime Minister of Jamaica, the Most Honourable Andrew Holness; Premier of Montserrat, Honourable Easton Taylor-Farrell; Prime Minister of St Kitts and Nevis, Dr the Honourable Timothy Harris; Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, Honourable Allen Chastanet; Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dr. the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves and President of Suriname, His Excellency Chandrikapersad Santokhi.

The Bahamas was represented by Honourable Darren Henfield, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Associate Members in attendance were: Bermuda represented by Deputy Premier Honourable Walter Roban and the British Virgin Islands represented by Premier, Honourable Andrew Fahie;

OPENING

Chair of the Conference of Heads of Government Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley, immediate past Chair Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dr. the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves and Secretary-General Ambassador Irwin LaRocque delivered statements at the opening of the meeting.

The statements are available at www.caricom.org

COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE REGION

Heads of Government discussed the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Member States and agreed to issue the attached statement.

CARICOM ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND TRANSFORMATION (CERT)

Heads of Government received an update from the Prime Minister of Barbados, Honourable Mia Amor Mottley, on the CARICOM Economic Recovery and Transformation (CERT) Programme which includes securing immediate liquidity enhancements to begin the process of economic revitalization; debt refinancing; measures to protect the balance of payments and boost regional production.

Heads of Government reiterated their call for a new allocation of Special Drawing Rights to boost global liquidity; the conversion of COVID-related debt into long-term, low-interest loans; and the use of a multi-dimensional universal vulnerability index and vulnerability criteria to determine access to concessional funding by small middle income States.

Heads of Government also established a small team to be led by the Honourable Prime Minister of Barbados and comprising the Vice President of Guyana as well as representation from the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and Trinidad and Tobago to undertake a resource mobilization roadshow.

CARICOM SINGLE MARKET AND ECONOMY

Heads of Government expressed continuing concern about the progress made and the outstanding actions still required to advance implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) particularly to support economic recovery in the face of the debilitating impact of COVID 19.

Heads of Government reaffirmed the critical role of the CSME in the Region's strategy for sustained economic growth, to build economic resilience by developing the capacity to withstand both external and internal shocks to the Community

They agreed to review urgently the entire consultation and decision-making processes at all levels in the effort to establish the most effective strategy for effecting increased levels of implementation. They also agreed that an immediate step towards achieving implementation would be led by the Lead Head of Government with responsibility for the CSME, Prime Minister Mia Mottley.

Heads of Government mandated the Council for Finance and Planning (COFAP) to meet urgently no later than end of March 2021, to resolve the outstanding issues and reach agreement with respect to the CARICOM Financial Services Agreement (CFSA), the Regional Securities Market, the Community Investment Policy and Credit Reporting.

Heads of Government urged the removal of non-tariff barriers to trade among Member States and the simplification of administrative procedures for free movement of people in order to boost economic output.

They stressed the urgent need to address and resolve those critical issues that impede the benefits of the CSME being enjoyed by all, particularly the private sector on which the Region is depending to fuel the recovery of its economies and which needed to be fully engaged at both the national and regional levels.

Heads of Government also urged the Special Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED)-ICT to expedite the establishment of the Single ICT Space together with access to reduced roaming rates and enhanced access to broadband as well as to examine the feasibility of establishing a Single Regional Telecommunications Regulator for the consideration of the Forty-Second Meeting of the Conference in July 2021. This would be fundamental to advance the digital economy.

Heads of Government recognising that the Multilateral Air Services Agreement (MASA) is now in effect, instructed the Special COTED (Transportation) to work with Member States to take the action necessary for an effective air transportation system. The Council was also instructed to follow up on the initiatives aimed at building maritime capacity especially for transportation of agricultural produce.

Heads of Government directed that to develop further maritime transportation and support intra-regional cargo, a study be undertaken to review the status of existing port facilities in Member States; this with a view to determining those requiring update to their facilities.

CARICOM Development Fund (CDF)

Heads of Government reiterated the important role of the CARICOM Development Fund (CDF) to the social and economic advancement of the Community. They noted that in the context of the dire fiscal, economic and social circumstances facing Member States arising from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CDF should be positioned to provide support to Member States' post-pandemic recovery efforts.

Heads of Government therefore agreed to a further one-year extension to the CDF's second contribution and subvention cycle to 30 June 2022.

They recognised the potential impact of funding shortfalls and protracted payment delays on Member States' programmes and the CDF's liquidity,

financial sustainability and capacity to fulfil its mandate.

Heads of Government instructed the CDF to continue its efforts at mobilising funds from international development partners (IDPs) and other agencies to assist in replenishing the capital fund of the CDF. They further instructed the CDF to submit a proposal to the Council for Finance and Planning for the issuance of a Growth and Resilience Bond to support the economic recovery and transformation of Member States.

Commission on the Economy

Heads of Government accepted the Final Report (*"Caribbean 9:58"*) of the CARICOM Commission on the Economy, comprising of a group of eminent regional and international experts who provided advice on implementable solutions to build resilience and return CARICOM economies to a path of sustainable growth and development. The Report contained a Prologue which set out a *12-Point Action Plan in Response to the COVID-19 Global Pandemic*.

Heads of Government decided that the CARICOM Secretariat will work with the Commission to review the recommendations so that the relevant Community Organs can formulate Implementation Plans for the consideration of the Forty-Second Regular Meeting of the Conference in July 2021.

Heads of Government agreed to the early publication and circulation of the Report in order to facilitate a region-wide debate on the recommendations within the context of the economic challenges and prospects for the Community. The regional debate will be facilitated by the Chairman and Members of the Commission.

Heads of Government expressed their appreciation to the Chairman and Members of the Commission for their work in producing an incisive and strategic Report.

ADVANCING THE REGIONAL AGENDA ON FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

Heads of Government welcomed the presentation by the Lead Head of Government responsible for Agriculture; Agricultural Diversification and Food

Security in the CARICOM Quasi Cabinet, His Excellency Mohammed Irfaan Ali, President of Guyana.

They commended the President of Guyana on the work done in developing the proposed strategies as set out in the paper entitled: **“Advancing the CARICOM Agri-Food Systems Agenda; Prioritising Regional Food and Nutrition Security”**.

Heads of Government acknowledged that the situation of food security in the Caribbean Community remained a major challenge, now exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. They noted issues with accessibility to healthy foods, disruptions in production and productivity and to global supply chains, as well as vulnerability to climate change and barriers to intra-regional trade.

Heads of Government noted that the Region’s food import bill continued to rise and called for more investment in agriculture and food production.

Heads of Government endorsed the development of the agri-food system strategy through strategic partnership with regional private sector bodies to promote commercialization of the sector and supported the implementation of policy recommendations in that regard.

Heads of Government urged the Member States to consider to allocate a specific percentage of locally produced agricultural products to be procured through the public procurement systems within Member States.

Heads of Government urged Member States to commit to a targeted percentage allocation of public spending in the Food and Agriculture Sector and to the harmonisation of sanitary and phytosanitary standards across the Region to address barriers to intra-regional trade.

Heads of Government agreed to the establishment of a Special Ministerial Task Force on Food Production and Food Security which would work closely with the private sector on an Action Plan to follow-up and monitor implementation of the strategy.

JOINT TOURISM POLICY

Heads of Government deliberated on the framework for a Joint Tourism Policy for CARICOM (JTTPC) to address the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

on the Region's tourism industry which has been particularly affected in terms of revenues, employment, foreign exchange retention and currency stability.

Heads of Government noted that the Community is the most tourism and travel dependent region in the world and had mandated the development of the Policy led by an Interim Tourism Working Group.

Heads of Government endorsed the framework and agreed to an iterative approach in developing the policy. They agreed that initially there would be an Emergency Tourism Plan with a subsequent more detailed policy and strategy being developed by the third quarter of 2021.

Heads of Government also endorsed the development of a Tourism Reserve Fund which would be financed by a levy contributed by a coalition of willing Member States.

Heads of Government commended the work of the Interim Tourism Working Group (ITWG) comprising representatives from the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), the CARICOM Secretariat as well as representatives of the Organisation of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission and the Government of Saint Lucia.

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR, LABOUR AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Heads of Government engaged with representatives of the CARICOM Private Sector Organisation and the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) on behalf of civil society.

They exchanged views on the CARICOM Single Market and Economy and proposals to boost the agriculture sector in particular.

Heads of Government welcomed the commitment by the CPSO to support fully the regional agenda on Food and Nutrition Security and to work closely with the Special Ministerial Task Force on Food Production and Food Security established by the Conference.

They welcomed the commitment by the CPDC to becoming a more meaningful partner going forward.

SECURITY ISSUES

Heads of Government received a report from the Council for National Security and Law Enforcement (CONSLE). They also received a security brief on areas of concern to the Region from the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS).

Heads of Government agreed to convene as soon as possible a High-level Summit of Member States and regional multi-sectoral partners on violence as a public health issue.

REPARATIONS

Heads of Government received a report from the Prime Ministerial Sub-Committee on Reparations (PMSCR) and recommitted to support and advance the issue.

They commended the CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC) on the significant outreach activities undertaken and the global impact of its work to-date.

Heads of Government urged Member States to engage actively youth and the creative community to increase public awareness and commitment as well as build a broad-based coalition in support of reparatory justice at the national and regional levels.

Heads of Government agreed to seek collaboration with the African Union (AU), to co-sponsor a proposed Summit with European Heads of Government. They also mandated the Secretariat to examine the modalities for convening a Summit on Reparations with the AU.

They agreed that the Chair of the PMSCR would collaborate with the CRC to mobilise technical assistance to develop a concept paper on the design, purpose and management of a proposed International Development Fund (IDF).

Heads of Government congratulated Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Chairman of the CARICOM Reparations Commission, on being conferred with the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Global Award in January 2021.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS; Haiti; British Virgin Islands

Heads of Government discussed the situation in Haiti and issued the attached statement.

Heads of Government discussed the situation in the British Virgin Islands and issued the attached statement.

BORDER ISSUES

Belize-Guatemala Relations

Heads of Government were informed of the progress of Guatemala's Territorial, Insular and Maritime Claim (Guatemala/Belize) at the International Court of Justice and noted that Guatemala has filed its Memorial and that Belize has until June 2022 to submit its Counter Memorial.

Heads of Government urged Belize, Guatemala and the OAS to continue implementing fully the existing Confidence Building Measures.

Heads of Government recalled that both countries and the OAS had committed to design a mechanism of co-operation for the Sarstoon River and called on them to redouble their efforts to this end.

They recognised the significant role of the OAS in the process aimed at resolving the dispute, and called on the international community to increase support for the OAS Office in the Adjacency Zone.

Heads of Government reiterated their unequivocal support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of Belize.

Guyana-Venezuela Relations

Heads of Government welcomed the decision made by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on December 18, 2020, that it has jurisdiction to entertain the Application filed by Guyana on March 29, 2018 and noted that it paves the way for the ICJ to consider the merits of the case concerning the Arbitral Award of 3 October 1899 (Guyana v. Venezuela). Heads of Government expressed their disappointment over the rejection by Venezuela of the decision of the Court.

Heads of Government reiterated their concern over the issuance of decree No 4.415 on January 7, 2021, which claimed for Venezuela sovereignty and exclusive sovereign rights in the waters and seabed adjacent to Guyana's coast. The subsequent illegal interception and detention, in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Guyana, of two Guyanese registered fishing vessels and their crew members by a Venezuelan naval vessel on January 21, 2021 were condemned.

Heads of Government noted with satisfaction that the cumulative effort of the region contributed to the unconditional release by Venezuela of the fishing vessels and crews.

Heads of Government expressed their full support for the ongoing judicial process that is intended to bring a peaceful and definitive end to the long-standing controversy between the two countries and urged Venezuela to participate in the process.

Heads of Government remained very concerned about the threatening posture of Venezuela and reaffirmed their consistent support for the maintenance and preservation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Guyana.

CARICOM US RELATIONS

Heads of Government exchanged views on CARICOM relations with the United States of America in the context of the change in Administration in the US and emphasised that the country remains one of the Community's most important external relationships.

Heads of Government agreed that every effort would be made to engage the new US Administration at all levels once sufficient groundwork has been laid. Efforts should also be made to build on existing formal initiatives such as the US-Caribbean Strategic Act and active platforms of engagement on energy, trade, security, education, disaster management and resilience.

They called for greater cooperation on firearms including locating an ATF officer in the Southern Caribbean along with a Homeland Security Investigations Officer. Heads of Government reaffirmed their commitment in the fight against Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and agreed to a démarche articulating their concerns with the modalities of the TIP Report.

They underlined the importance of engaging also with the US Congress and its specialised committees. This would allow for engagement on issues of interest such as blacklisting, correspondent banking, access to concessional financing and other security issues.

They also urged the Community to broaden its outreach beyond USA state-to-state institutions to include academia, labour, the private sector, think tanks and the Caribbean diaspora whose advocacy could be of assistance in advancing the Region's interests.

Heads of Government welcomed the early indications from the US that there would be greater emphasis on the fight against climate change, an issue of existential importance to the Community.

DATE OF THE FORTY-SECOND REGULAR MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE

The Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda will assume the Chair of the Conference for the six-month period commencing 1 July 2021. The 42nd Regular Meeting will be held from 5 – 6 July 2021.



STATEMENT BY THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY ON HAITI

Heads of Government expressed their deep concern over the deteriorating political situation and the deepening public anxiety over citizen security in Haiti.

They took note of the Report of the United Nations Secretary General of 11 February 2021 and of the comments therein on the political and governance issues.

Heads of Government underlined the importance of respect for the rule of law and constitutional processes as laid out in the CARICOM Charter of Civil Society, and the primary responsibility of the government to this end.

They called on the political actors to engage in dialogue to reach consensus on the way forward and establish an enabling environment for the conduct,

as quickly as possible, of the elections to renew the lapsed Legislative and Local Government Institutions.

Heads of Government look forward to the conduct of free and fair Presidential Elections, in accordance with the Constitution of Haiti.

25 February 2021



STATEMENT BY THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY ON

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY IN THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Heads of Government received a letter from the Premier of the British Virgin Islands which apprised of the announcement on 18 January 2021 of a Commission of Inquiry (COI) “to establish whether there is evidence of corruption and abuse of office or other serious dishonesty” in the British Virgin Islands. The COI was ordered by the then sitting Governor.

Heads of Government are cognisant of the disquiet that has arisen among the people of the British Virgin Islands about the establishment of the COI. Further, the Heads of Government are dismayed at the manner in which the COI was established with no consultation, or prior communication, between the UK government and the duly-elected government of the British Virgin Islands.

Heads of Government noted the strongly-expressed concerns on this matter by the British Virgin Islands government, which concerns are also shared by other Associate Members of the Community.

25 February 2021



STATEMENT BY THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY ON ACCESS TO COVID-19 VACCINES

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is dissatisfied and deeply concerned about the inequitable access to vaccines for Small Developing States like those of the Community.

CARICOM calls for equitable access to vaccines in order to curb the impact of the pandemic, to protect our citizens and bolster the economy. As the virus does not discriminate, access to vaccines should not be discriminatory, with a few countries dominating the market with their resources and their volumes. Heads of Government noted that to date, even countries with the funds to purchase, have been unable to procure and receive vaccines through commercial arrangements, given the relatively small volumes which they seek.

Member States noted that although they have all signed on to the highly valued and appreciated COVAX Facility, the only vaccines received in the region to date were through the generosity of the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, who has donated 170,000 vaccines to Barbados and Dominica through bi-lateral arrangements. CARICOM commends Prime Minister Modi for his generosity, which it is understood, will be continued. They also thanked Barbados and Dominica for having shared their initial supplies which were received from India.

Member States further noted that while the COVAX Facility will provide up to 20 percent of Members' needs, this limited supply will not allow us to attain the regional herd immunity, so necessary to fuel the resilient recovery that we are seeking. Heads of Government therefore call for a mechanism that allows smaller countries to have access to sufficient vaccines at the earliest juncture, if action is to be put behind the oft-repeated phrase that "no-one is safe until everyone is safe".

Other initiatives, such as procurement through the African Union's African Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP), as well as bilateral arrangements, are being pursued by some Member States with the support of CARICOM. We commend the government of the Republic of South Africa and the African Union, for having carved out an allocation for CARICOM countries.

We urge developed countries, and especially those in our neighbourhood whose populations travel frequently to our region, and who host our largest diaspora populations, to make some available to the Community, initially as an interim supply given the immediacy of the need. CARICOM has taken a decision to write to the governments of some traditional partners on the matter.

Attention is also needed at the multilateral level and to this end, the Community has called on the World Health Organization (WHO) to convene a Global Summit to address urgently equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, particularly for developing countries, which should be held in the context of the World Health Organization's ACT-A Facilitation Council.

25 February 2021

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