



**The Honorable Gaston A. Browne
Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda
Statement**

24th June, 2020

Update on COVID-19 Cases

My dear fellow citizens and residents

I am making this statement to address fears that may have arisen from the information, provided by the Ministry of Health, that 39 new cases of imported COVID-19 have been detected and managed.

I emphasize to you, that none of these cases is a threat to the community at this time, and that, through our identification, tracing and quarantining process, the Ministry of Health is containing and treating affected persons.

The 39 new cases are persons, in which in excess of half are returning nationals – who entered Antigua by air over the last few days.

These nationals are now quarantined and isolated at the Government facility at Hawksbill hotel and will not be released into the community until they test negative.

It is important that you know that none of these persons have been hospitalized.

Presently, there is no one hospitalized in Antigua & Barbuda with COVID, and none of the new cases require hospitalization.

The remaining individuals, are in hotel properties which are equipped with facilities to isolate, monitor and treat these individuals who tested positive for COVID.

The staff at these hotels are also fully trained to deal with such guests, who will not be allowed to venture outside of the hotels' compound, and who will also be under constant medical surveillance.

The well-being and good health of our population remains the principal consideration of our government and health authorities who will address you later.

The detection and quarantining of these 39 new cases, demonstrate the effectiveness of the procedures that have been established and are being scrupulously implemented at our ports of entry.

No one is exempt from them now, nor will they be at any time in the future.

That includes me, every Government Minister, the Governor-General - simply put, everyone who enters the country from abroad will be tested and quarantined or isolated as appropriate while this pandemic continues.

We are learning from experience.

So, is every other country in the world.

We are not unique.

Many countries are learning from our experience, as we are learning from theirs.

We are already bolstering our arrangements at the airport and other ports of entry, including the acquisition of 12,500 rapid test kits, 20,000 swabs and 2000 reagents which have been shipped and will arrive on the island shortly.

Despite the enormous pressure on government revenues that have been badly hit by the effects of COVID-19 on our economy, we have carved out funds to buy these COVID-19 testing supplies.

Our purpose is to isolate any who tests positive and to keep them away from our healthy domestic population.

I know that there will be those who will seize this opportunity to attack the Government, claiming that we should have kept our borders closed to all, including nationals who were trapped abroad.

Those, who make these claims, do so for selfish political reasons.

They would prefer the economy to wither and die; they would prefer unemployment to rise and poverty to increase, just so that they can take advantage of people's suffering for their own selfish political ends.

That is not what I stand for.

Nor, is it what the Government I lead stands for.

From the first moment of my election to the Office of Prime Minister, my only purpose has been the welfare of my people – the people of Antigua and Barbuda.

In the first hour of my stewardship of this country's affairs, even before I appointed a Cabinet, I had to deal with the reality that the then foreign-owned WIOC, was about to cut-off all oil supplies to our country, leaving us without electricity, or any other form of energy completely.

I also had to deal with the foreign-owned water company, which was threatening to cut off all water supply.

I dealt with those matters immediately and successfully, driven by only one thing and one thing only – and that is the well-being of the people of this country.

There have been many other issues in my government's six-years in office that threatened this country and its people.

My government has met each one of them, looked them in the eye and surmounted them.

We did so with your help, your resolve, your determination, that we shall not sink; that we shall struggle, but we shall conquer.

We are faced now with a double threat of extraordinary magnitude.

We created neither.

The first is the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected 9.3M people and killed 478K globally. In Antigua and Barbuda, by comparison we have had 65 cases and only three deaths.

Our low numbers were due to swift action, planning and implementation, with the allocation of scarce resources for the protection of all our people.

The second is the abrupt and devastating effect on our economy that has shattered our tourism industry, put thousands of our people out of work and affected every business, every family, and every productive activity of our country.

My Government and the country as a whole, was faced with a choice of continuing to keep our borders shut and watch our country and its people decline into abject poverty and disaster, or open the borders, while putting protections firmly in place, that would give tourism a chance to revive and our people a better opportunity to live and prosper.

After the widest consultation with various sectors of the society, including local businesses, the hotel sector and trade unions, we decided to reopen the border.

We always knew that there would be a risk that COVID-19 infected persons would arrive at our ports, which I have said on numerous occasions.

That is why we put in place the elaborate structures for identifying them and quarantining or isolating them as appropriate.

The detection of the recent 39 COVID cases shows that our system works.

Nonetheless, we are strengthening the system even more.

Let me reemphasize – everyone who enters Antigua and Barbuda, including returning nationals, to live within communities with relatives and friends, with no exception, will be tested and will be quarantined mandatorily.

We must continue to keep our country safe.

In this, everyone must continue to play their part.

Wearing masks, physical distancing and good hygiene standards continue to be absolute imperatives in everyone's interests.

I implore you to observe them.

Each Antiguan & Barbudan should exercise a heightened level of vigilance and personal responsibility to avoid local transmission from these imported cases that will occur, from time to time.

These battles we face can be won.

To do so, we all have to be on the front lines.

And, as we have done in the past, we shall succeed.

The path to success is never easy; the path to failure is much easier.

Failure, for us, is not an option.

I end by assuring you, that we will continue to be vigilant over all persons admitted to our homeland, and we will keep our homeland safe.

God bless you, and God bless our beloved Antigua and Barbuda

Stay Safe - Stay Strong – Stay United