



Press Release

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BARBADOS AND OECS RAISE THE STAKES AT HISTORIC -73RD WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

“This is a crisis therefore that strikes not only at the heart of our humanity but also at the organization of our human societies.” PM Mia Mottley

The Chairperson of CARICOM, and the prime minister of Barbados, the Hon. Mia Mottley was one of the 14 Heads of Government who addressed the recently concluded 73rd World Health Assembly. The prime minister in her address on behalf of the Caribbean Community CARICOM recognized they could not fight COVID-19 but instead tried to delay its arrival in the Caribbean.

Prime Minister Mottley described ‘the Caribbean region’s economies as the most travelled and tourism dependent in the world, adding that our people and economies are exposed in a way that we have not experienced since becoming independent’. “The closing of our borders and the trebling of unemployment, and the reduction of our government revenues by half, has created grave challenges.”

Commending the “intervening hand” of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and World Health Organization (WHO) and CARPHA, the Prime Minister said these agencies sought to move the region closer to a level playing field, but lamented that there is still much work to be done.

Prime Minister Mottley outlined the need for “moral leadership” that would “recognize that the use of historic per capita income to determine access to concessional funds or grant funds, or to determine fair access to the procurement of goods, is unacceptable”.

The World Health Assembly heard that the use of certain criteria did not allow for vulnerable territories in the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific to access funds and that such criteria bore little or no relevance to our current vulnerability and challenges.

Mottley thanked WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, for reaching out to the Executive Director of the Global Fund to advocate for the countries in the region that have been excluded from procurement through the consortium of critical COVID-19 medical supplies. Our region, it was said, “urgentlyUrgently needs adequate numbers of the appropriate tests, in particular the rapid tests that are affordable and reliable, if we are to allow our societies and economies to reopen safely.”

The Minister of Health and Wellness, for Barbados, Lt Col. Jeffery Bostic, also shared Barbados’ preparedness prior to recording the first cases of COVID-19. Minister Bostic shared key highlights of the response identified on procurement of urgently needed medical equipment and supplies in an environment of scarcity; and strengthening of the infrastructure of the health care system, including laboratory capacity for the diagnosis of COVID-19. Minister Bostic said “We are cognizant of the on-going health needs of our people and are determined to not be paralyzed by this pandemic”.

Speaking on behalf of the OECS, Antigua and Barbuda’s Minister of Health, the Hon. Molywn Joseph, reiterated that “containment works”, stating that “all countries in the region were able to ‘flatten the curve’.”

However, Minister Joseph lamented that the response to the public health crisis has resulted in the related economic and social crises, adding that “tourism accounts for over 50-percent of GDP and nearly 40-percent of employment across the region”.

As a country still grappling with recovery from hurricane devastation, Minister Joseph told the WHA that Antigua & Barbuda requires global partnerships to address the needs resulting from COVID-19 and beyond. Access to financing and debt, continued support from PAHO and WHO to strengthen health systems, access to supplies to manage the COVID-19 pandemic and development of relevant protocols for reopening of the economies.

Dominica's Minister of Health, Wellness and New Health Investment, the Hon. Dr. Irving McIntyre, expressed thanks to those who assisted Dominica, including China, the WHO, Venezuela and Cuba.

The Minister observed that "as we continue to share the experience of COVID-19, the world should emerge better prepared for future infectious diseases".

He added: "The importance of striking a balance between maintenance of livelihoods and economic activity while preserving our health status and gains made so far is a delicate one, more so as local economies and borders are reopened in a phased manner."

Minister of Health, Wellness and the Environment in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Hon. Robert T.L.V. Browne, said the pandemic has taught his country that "we don't have a developing world and a developed world; we have one world and we are all in it together."

Minister Browne reflected on challenges faced by his nation. "Our response was affected by the disruption of supply chains and trade restrictions. It took us two and half months to get a PCR diagnostic machine (out of the USA), and even the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for all its good intentions and explosive might seemed powerless to help us on this matter."

Minister of Health and Wellness of St. Lucia, the Hon. Mary Isaac, advised the WHA that "to facilitate quarantine and isolation of persons identified through contact tracing and those returning from high risk COVID-19 areas, five public health facilities were established in hotels and a hospital was retrofitted as a respiratory hospital,".

St. Kitts & Nevis Minister of Agriculture and Health, the Hon. Eugene Hamilton, had this to say when addressing the WHA. "Global success in winning the war against Covid-19 will be largely dependent on strong leadership at all levels - government, the private sector, and civil society. The focus must be on saving lives, safe vaccine development, and recalibration towards a new normal that includes the rights to health and a life of dignity for all people."

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