

## ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)

### THE 25<sup>TH</sup> ORDINARY MEETING OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL (Virtual Meeting)

Secretariat of the ACS, Port of Spain, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

June 19<sup>th</sup> 2020

### **STATEMENT BY THE 25<sup>TH</sup> ORDINARY MEETING OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS) ON COVID-19**

1. The 25<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), meeting virtually on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2020 as a result and in the context of the historic global human experience occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, **acknowledges with solemnity the considerable human, socio-economic, cultural, environmental and political toll** of this scourge on the people and nations of the international community. The Ministerial Council notes with appreciation the efforts of the ACS at this juncture, under the leadership of its 25<sup>th</sup> Chairman, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados, the Hon. Dr. Jerome X. Walcott with the support of Secretary General, Dr. June Soomer.
2. The Council **reflects critically on the outcome of the ACS consultations** held since March 2020 to coordinate the actions of membership in the face of the pandemic, with the aim of identifying best practices and lessons learnt and distilling and incorporating them into common strategies and recommendations for concerted action to address the impact of the pandemic in the Greater Caribbean. The First Extraordinary Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ministers of Health of the ACS on COVID-19, the First and Second Extraordinary Meetings of the Founding Observer Organisations of the ACS on COVID-19 and the First ACS Multi-Sectoral Technical Meeting on COVID-19 resulted in discussion on:

- a. *An ACS Draft Strategy for Managing COVID-19 in the Region;*
- b. *Towards the Creation of a Humanitarian Corridor in the ACS Membership: Addressing the Inequality of Vulnerable Groups during Disasters and Crises;*
- c. *Terms of Reference (TOR) for the establishment and functioning of a Multi-Sectoral Technical Group on COVID-19.*

The ACS Secretariat also created a *Greater Caribbean COVID-19 Dashboard* to provide regional decision makers and the wider public with live statistics tracing the evolution of the spread and control of the Coronavirus in the Greater Caribbean. The Dashboard can be found online at: <http://greatercaribbean.org/covid19/dashboard/>.

3. The Ministerial Council expresses its **particular concern regarding the negative and disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the world's vulnerable populations**, including women, children, the elderly, the indigenous, migrants and ethnic minorities, and urges governments, the Private Sector and civil society to continue to work together with special care to protect these groups.
4. The 25<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Council notes with sober and cautious satisfaction, the **ongoing individual and collective restraint, sacrifice and responsibility** exercised by the Governments, Institutions, and Peoples of its Membership in fighting the pandemic. In this regard, the ACS **expresses its solidarity** with those of its Membership, and the wider global community, still seeking to contain the spread and impact of the virus, while commending and celebrating with those states that have sufficiently contained or eliminated its spread, as to safely re-open their economies at the pace deemed appropriate by their leadership.
5. The Ministerial Council acknowledges **the need for cooperation to mitigate against the deleterious impact of the COVID-19 pandemic** in the Greater Caribbean. The Council also highlights **the importance of multilateral approaches to address the challenges faced by the Region** due to the pandemic and encourages advocacy to garner support for the vulnerable States and territories of the Greater Caribbean, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS), noting their specific challenges.

6. The Ministerial Council notes with satisfaction, the **Memorandum of Understanding between the Association of Caribbean States and the Regional Logistics Centre for Humanitarian Assistance** that outlines significant advancements in the formulation of their Plan of Action to determine areas for the management of knowledge, collaboration, training and good practices in addressing the impact of disasters.
7. **Special recognition is extended to the Government and People of Cuba for the medical service and support** to the ACS and world States and territories in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic. The Greater Caribbean salutes Cuba. The ACS **reaffirms its appeal to the government of the United States of America to end the economic, commercial and financial embargo that it imposes on Cuba and to repeal the Helms Burton law** and to stop its extraterritorial enforcement.
8. The Council further **rejects the application of coercive unilateral measures** that are contrary to International Law and that harm the peace and prosperity of Greater Caribbean States. These must be eliminated in order to meet the humanitarian needs of Caribbean people in these distressing times.
9. The 8<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government of the ACS recognised **the unilateral listing of uncooperative fiscal jurisdictions as one of the multifaceted and stratified threats that the Greater Caribbean faces**, especially the Small Island Developing States and Low-Lying Coastal States, to achieve sustainable Development. The Ministerial Council therefore **notes with concern the publication of the European Union (EU)** on May 7, 2020, of a new list of countries considered to have strategic weaknesses in their frameworks for combatting money laundering and terrorist financing, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as it considerably limits their possibility of accessing financial resources to continue tackling the health emergency resulting from COVID-19 and for the economic recovery phase. These countries include The Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago.

10. The ACS recognises that small domestic markets, limited capacity and, in some instances, the isolation of national financial systems from global finance networks, create **challenges and additional adverse effects for the participation of some Greater Caribbean countries in global markets.** These should be taken into account with a view to ensuring access to financial resources to continue addressing the public health emergency posed by COVID 19 and to support economic recovery.
11. The Association of Caribbean States expresses its **gratitude and appreciation to the health professionals and personnel** in each state and territory of its membership who continue to do their jobs with commitment in trying circumstances and on the frontline of a global fight for health and life. The ACS also recognises the **commitment of other public and social service providers** to maintain the wellbeing of each sector and demographic of the population of the Greater Caribbean.
12. **The ACS reaffirms its commitment to contribute to peace, health and safety in the Greater Caribbean.**