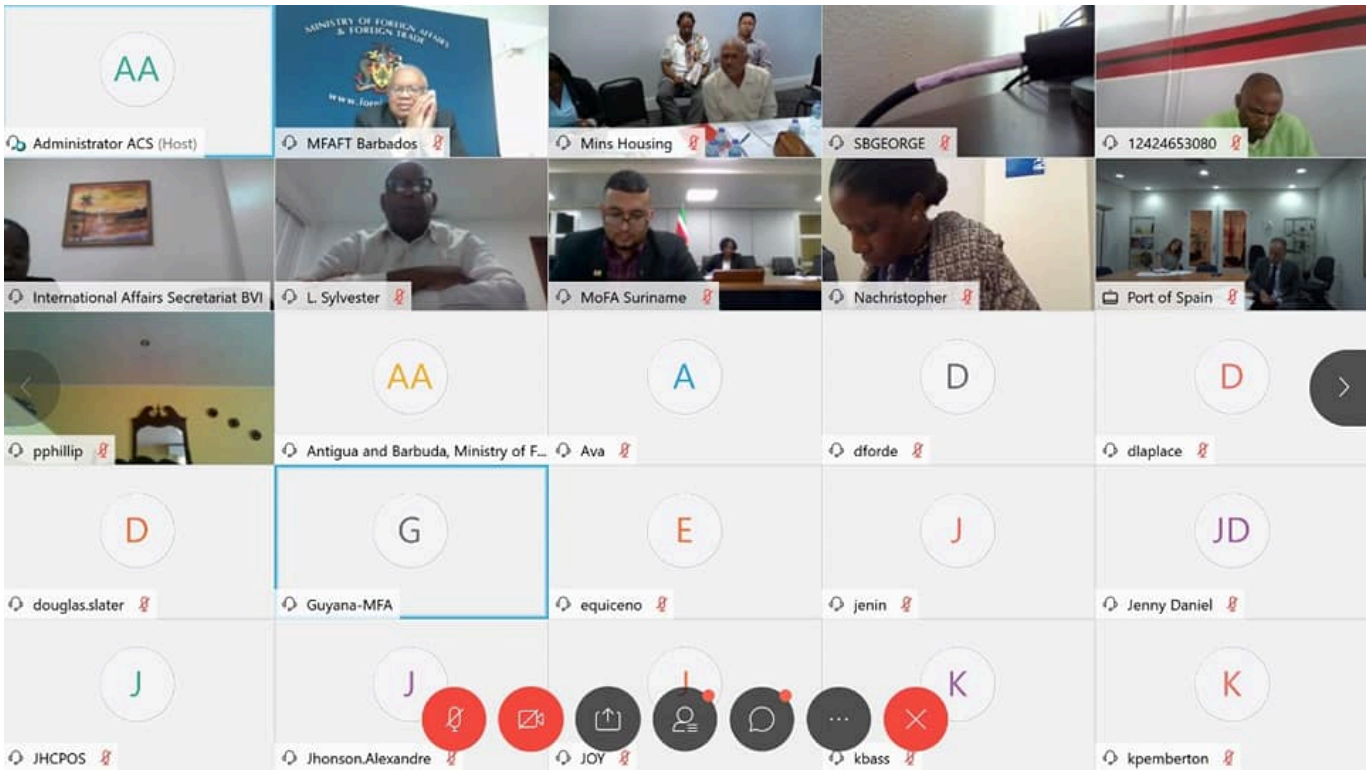
**ACS to Coordinate Regional Response to COVID-19**




ACS Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ministers of Health to coordinate responses to COVID-19 as a Region

Port-of-Spain

Foreign Affairs and Health Ministers of 33 ACS countries, territories and regional organisations have decided to coordinate their responses and to set up a meeting of technical experts to conceptualise a joint regional response and strategies in tackling the deadly pandemic COVID-19.

The Ministers, Chief Medical Officers and other functionaries of countries of the Greater Caribbean shared their national responses and concerns in the First Extraordinary Meeting of ACS Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ministers of Health on COVID-19, hosted virtually by the ACS Secretariat in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. Ministers expressed solidarity and wishes of a speedy recovery to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic, Miguel Vargas, who tested positive for the virus this week.

Chair of the Ministerial Council of Barbados Dr. Jerome X. Walcott noted, “Since the beginning of the year, the world has been focused on coronavirus… in this region it has been spreading and all countries and territories of the region have been affected in various ways. This was a very important meeting in the interest of all Caribbean states that relates to how we deal collectively and collaboratively in addressing the public scourge of COVID-19.”

ACS Secretary General Dr. June Soomer posited that “Information-sharing must be the first step. We have heard how different regions are doing different things and how they are doing similar things. Best practices must be shared.” She called for the regional organisations such as ACS, CARICOM and ECLAC to be at the table together in all discussions. ” SG Soomer recommended that any regional response to this new strain of coronavirus must include strategies for testing, care, communication, coordinating supplies, food security, immigration and customs, education, geo-mapping, remote work systems and the psychological impact of the virus and quarantine.

Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs Bruno Rodriguez, who spoke to the internal progress made by his country and the human resources and technical support provided globally recommended that a technical discussion be the follow-up to the Meeting of Ministers. He indicated: “Despite this difficult situation, Cuba can modestly offer some cooperation… We cannot underestimate the value of joint efforts.” Cuba also suggests inviting other countries of the hemisphere, including the United States and Canada, which may be willing to participate in the interest of expanding coordination and exchange.” He also stressed that the region will have to carefully consider the ways to face the economic, commercial and the consequent social impacts on all of our countries, especially on vulnerable groups.

Noting that COVID-19 is no respecter of persons, Executive Director of the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) Dr. Joy St. John urged the Region to focus on “governance in this global crisis.” She stressed that there is no known treatment for the virus.

The ACS Secretariat will announce the details of the technical meeting in the coming days. There was participation from: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad & Tobago, Venezuela, Aruba, British Virgin Islands, France, Guadeloupe, The Kingdom of the Netherlands, Martinique, Sint Maarten, CARICOM, ECLAC, SELA, CARPHA and PAHO.

Established in 1994, the Association of Caribbean States is an organisation for consultation, cooperation and concerted action in the Greater Caribbean. The ACS coordinates the mandates of its 25 Member States and 10 Associate Members. Its work is focused on, but not limited to disaster risk reduction; sustainable tourism, trade, transport and the protection and preservation of the Caribbean Sea.