

**COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE TWENTY-NINTH
INTER-SESSIONAL MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF HEADS OF
GOVERNMENT OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY**

26-27 February 2018, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

The Twenty-Ninth Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was held at Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on 26-27 February 2018. The President of Haiti, His Excellency Jovenel Moïse, Chaired the proceedings.

Other Members of the Conference in attendance were Prime Minister of The Bahamas, Honourable Dr. Hubert Minnis; Prime Minister of Barbados, Rt. Honourable Freundel Stuart; Prime Minister of Grenada, Dr. the Rt. Honourable Keith Mitchell; Prime Minister of Jamaica, the Most Honourable Andrew Holness; Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, Honourable Allen Chastanet; Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dr. the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves; and Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley.

Antigua and Barbuda was represented by His Excellency Ambassador Colin Murdoch; Belize was represented by Senator the Honourable Michael Peyrefitte, Attorney General; Dominica was represented by the Honourable Francine Baron, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Guyana was represented by His Excellency Vice President Carl Greenidge; Montserrat was represented by the Honourable Delmaude Ryan, Deputy Premier and Minister of Education, Health, Youth Affairs, Sports and Social Services; St Kitts and Nevis was represented by the Honourable Vance Amory, Senior Minister; Suriname was represented by His Excellency Vice-President, Michael Ashwin Adhin.

Associate Members in attendance were British Virgin Islands represented by Dr. the Hon Kedrick Pickering, Deputy Premier; the Turks and Caicos Islands represented by Hon. Sean Astwood, Deputy Premier.

OPENING CEREMONY

The Opening Ceremony was addressed by the Secretary-General Ambassador Irwin LaRocque, the immediate past chairman Dr. the Rt. Honourable Keith Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada, and the Chairman, His Excellency Jovenel Moïse, President of the Republic of Haiti.

The Secretary-General noted the challenge associated with accessing concessional funding for CARICOM Member States. He pointed to how the challenge affected the countries who were affected by the Hurricanes last September and cited the particular circumstances of Associate Members such as the British Virgin Islands which have no recourse to concessional financing.

Ambassador LaRocque noted the heavy toll of crime and violence on the society including the role of families in addressing this scourge. “The foundation of any strong society is the family, and it is within that circle that the battle against this scourge must begin,” he stated.

Prime Minister Mitchell brought into focus the importance of completing the measures to fully implement the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), which was key to building economic resilience by ensuring that “we trade freely intra-regionally; particularly in agriculture products, which, for many of us, form the backbone of our exports.”

He also underlined the urgency of applying the approved Implementation Plan for the period 2017-2019 to accelerate the use of the measures under the regime.

The Prime Minister noted that the Community had been steadfastly putting the pillars in place to build a society that was viable and sustainable but pointed to significant challenges that had to be overcome, both internally and externally. In this regard, he cited the unilateral blacklisting of countries as non-cooperative tax jurisdictions as a major external challenge and the prohibitive cost of air travel regionally as a serious internal issue which must be addressed.

President Moise announced that he would be organising an international conference on the strengthening of the mechanisms of resilience to the effects of climate change and the management of natural disasters in the Caribbean.

This, he indicated, would be “an opportunity for the States, partners and international development actors to exchange ideas and make proposals on the best features of prevention and responses to natural disasters.”

The Chairman noted that one of the options to counteract the harmful consequences of these adverse events would be to establish or strengthen funding mechanisms for disaster risk.

“These will help countries affected quickly access, the next day even after disasters, funds for reconstruction through affordable and effective procedures rather than be paralyzed by the expectation of unlikely assistance which, in most cases, is too little, comes too late and, sometimes, never happens,” President Moise added.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND RECOVERY

Heads of Government recognised the unprecedented occurrence of successive major hurricanes striking in a period of less than two (2) weeks in September 2017 and the devastating impact on some Member States and Associate Members. They acknowledged that such occurrences signalled the advent of a new normal to which we must adapt given that the next hurricane season was less than five months away.

They noted that the vulnerability of CARICOM Member States to natural hazards and the effects of climate change remained key challenges to sustainable development.

Heads of Government welcomed the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency's (CDEMA) Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) Strategy 2014-2024 as the Caribbean's platform for achieving risk resilience. They noted that the Regional Response Mechanism (RRM) coordinated by CDEMA was valuable and relevant but constrained by inadequate assets and financial resources.

They expressed appreciation for the solidarity shown by CARICOM Member States and regional institutions, as well as, the support of International Development Partners which was provided to the impacted Members States through the RRM.

Heads of Government recognised that strengthening infrastructure was a key component of building the Region's resilience, and that the implementation of building codes and associated standards was still a significant challenge in the Region. In that regard, they requested the CDEMA Council of Ministers to provide recommendations to the Conference for expediting implementation of building codes as a mechanism to safeguard critical infrastructure.

They also acknowledged that the efficacy of building the Community's resilience must involve the interaction of social, economic and environmental policies while strengthening infrastructure and ensuring that systems and institutions established to help the Region respond to natural disasters are adequately resourced.

Heads of Government noted that the magnitude of reconstruction required significant levels of financing which the Region was unable to generate on its own. They called for innovative financing mechanisms as well as recapitalisation for the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF). Therefore, they noted the proposal by CCRIF to extend the range of risk covered.

They also mandated CDEMA to commission the preparation of a comprehensive assessment of the resource requirements to operationalise an effective disaster risk management and mitigation strategy for the Community.

Heads of Government noted the challenges experienced by Member States with regard to the evacuation of nationals during the 2017 hurricane season, and the imperative of articulating a comprehensive regional approach to addressing evacuation in response to catastrophic events. In that regard, they welcomed the Model Evacuation Policy and Plan endorsed by the CDEMA Council of Ministers.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Heads of Government noted that focused implementation of the ambitious Paris Agreement was required in order to limit the most dangerous climate change impacts.

In this regard, they also recognised the need for focused and coordinated participation by CARICOM Member States in negotiations towards finalisation of the Paris Agreement Work Programme, in order to support and supplement positions taken by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

Heads of Government agreed that all countries that have not yet done so, would take the necessary action to ratify the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement as a matter of urgency, in order to support more ambitious climate change action.

They committed to support regional preparations for participation in negotiations throughout the year, and at COP 24, to take place in Katowice, Poland from 3-14 December 2018.

Heads of Government encouraged Member States to take advantage of the strategic opportunities for financing under the Green Climate Fund and other climate financing options through the necessary accreditation process.

SECURITY ISSUES

Counter-Terrorism

Heads of Government approved a Counter Terrorism Strategy and agreed to table related legislation by 4 July 2018.

Crime and Violence

Heads of Government recognised that the rising levels of crime and violence in Member States continued to engage governments and indeed, all sectors of society. These high levels of crime and violence erode confidence in Government, reduce the competitiveness of key industries and services, as well as reduce confidence among potential investors and contribute to brain drain.

Given the gravity of the problem in the Region, Heads of Government agreed to strengthen the relevant inter-sectoral systems at the national and regional levels to ensure efficient collaboration in planning and execution of relevant programmes to address the multifaceted issues with regard to crime and violence. In this regard they committed to considering the Five Pillar CARICOM Crime Prevention Action Plan in the development of national initiatives.

Heads of Government further agreed to strengthen collaboration with international partners to build capacity at all levels to address crime and violence.

Heads of Government mandated the Council for National Security and Law Enforcement (CONSLE) and the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) to create an intra-regional task force comprising experts in the field, to examine and suggest innovative regional solutions to combat the rise in crime and violence in Member States.

They also mandated the Secretariat to develop a comprehensive Action Plan for the development of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics.

CARICOM SINGLE MARKET AND ECONOMY

Heads of Government reiterated the critical importance of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) to regional development. They agreed to hold a Special Session on the CSME on the first day of the Thirty-Ninth Regular Meeting of the Conference in July 2018.

Heads of Government considered the Procedure on the Refusal of Entry of CARICOM Nationals to which Member States would adhere. They agreed that the Legal Affairs Committee (LAC) would finalise the procedure for the consideration of the Thirty-Ninth Regular Meeting of the Conference in July 2018.

Heads of Government called upon those Member States which have not yet implemented the decisions of the Conference on waivers of visas for Haitian nationals who are holders of diplomatic and official passports or businesspersons who are holders of US, Canadian or Schengen visas, to immediately implement those decisions, inform the International Air Transport Association and relevant airlines, and provide the Secretariat with the relevant documentation supporting the implementation by 30 March 2018.

Foreign Exchange Difficulties Affecting Trade between Member States

Heads of Government urged St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago to resolve the issue bilaterally and report to the next Regular Meeting of the Conference.

They also requested the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank to meet urgently to seek a solution to this matter.

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Heads of Government welcomed the new CARICOM Multilateral Air Services Agreement (MASA) and urged Member States to take steps towards its implementation. The assent of all Member States to the new MASA would facilitate the creation of a liberalised environment consistent with emerging World Trade Organization (WTO) aviation policies.

Heads of Government noted that this instrument is aimed at improving connectivity and the facilitating increased trade in goods and services, including tourism. MASA has been expanded to include “the conditions for a single security check for direct transit passengers on multi-stop intra-Community flights”

Heads of Government commended and expressed appreciation to the Government-owned airlines, namely Caribbean Airlines, LIAT, Suriname Airways and Bahamas Air, and other carriers, for their humanitarian efforts and exemplary performance following Hurricanes Jose, Irma and Maria, in rendering assistance in the regional co-ordination and national mobilization of relief personnel, passengers, goods and supplies.

TOURISM IN THE REGION: BUILDING A CARIBBEAN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING INITIATIVE

Heads of Government recognised that Tourism was the Caribbean's largest economic sector and it needed to be stimulated urgently and sustainably for the region's long term development prospects.

Heads of Government agreed to further consider the proposal of a levy on air transportation for passengers travelling from outside the region to participating countries, which would fund a new regional tourism marketing campaign, bearing in mind the need to also consider the issue of security in the marketing of tourism.

Heads of Government also agreed that the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) on Tourism and Transportation, and the Council for National Security and Law Enforcement (CONSLE) would make recommendations on this proposal for the consideration of the Conference at its next meeting in July.

Heads of Government welcomed the agreement reached to establish the Global Centre of Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management reached at the recently concluded UNWTO, Government of Jamaica, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank Conference on Jobs and Inclusive Growth to be hosted at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica. The Global Centre will assist destination preparedness, management and recovery from disruption and crisis that impact tourism and threaten economies and livelihoods.

Heads of Government noted the invitation from Guyana for Member States to participate in the XXIV Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High Level Authorities of Tourism to be held in Georgetown on 21-24, March 2018. They also noted that the occasion was an excellent opportunity for CARICOM Ministers of Tourism to have a dialogue with their counterparts from the Americas on matters that affect the growth and development of the tourism industry.

BLACKLISTING AND DE-RISKING

Heads of Government deplored the significant reputational damage inflicted on Member States from their inclusion in the list of 'non-cooperative tax jurisdictions' published by the European

Union Council in December 2017 as well as other unilateral processes which label Member States as 'tax havens'.

Heads of Government noted that these actions are occurring outside of the established global inclusive processes which CARICOM States have endorsed and in which they continue to participate, often at significant cost, to advance the implementation of agreed international standards domestically.

They recognised the need for Member States to continue to ensure that they meet all requisite standards set by the globally recognised authorities in respect of global tax co-operation and related initiatives. However, they denounced the unilateral processes underway in the European Union as detrimental to Member States' economic progress and efforts to achieve sustainable development. They agreed that they should forge links beyond CARICOM because of shifting global standards.

Heads of Government have also mandated that Ministers of Finance and Central Bank Governors meet expeditiously to consider proposals on a CARICOM Strategy which have been prepared by a CARICOM Technical Working Group and to formulate appropriate solutions to overcome this egregious challenge.

Heads of Government acknowledged the importance of regional advocacy efforts and agreed to continue engaging international partners and raising the issues at various international fora.

CLICO/BAICO

Heads of Government agreed that the issue would be resolved bilaterally between St Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago. They requested that the Conference receive periodic updates on the matter.

ENLARGEMENT POLICY FOR THE COMMUNITY

Heads of Government agreed that the Community proceed in the first instance with the applications for Associate Membership by the Dutch territories of Curacao and Aruba.

They mandated the Secretary-General to begin the process of negotiations on Associate Membership with these Dutch Territories in order to better determine their expectations of Associate Membership as well as what benefits this relationship could yield for the Community.

Heads of Government also agreed that further consideration would be given to the applications from the French Overseas territories of Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana.

They further agreed to continue to examine the issue of an Enlargement Policy for the Community.

WEST INDIES CRICKET

Heads of Government having reviewed relevant legal opinions agreed that cricket in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was a regional public good and, as a consequence, a course of action could be pursued whereby Governments would intervene in the governance of West Indies Cricket, as distinct from managing the operations of the sport.

They also agreed to move towards the development of a legislative framework for the governance of cricket which was consistent with international best practices and with the International Cricket Committee (ICC) principles.

Heads of Government further agreed that Member States would where necessary hold broad-based consultations with stakeholders on the matter

They indicated that as a follow-up to the letter of 14 March 2016 from the then Chairman of the Conference, Rt. Hon. Dean Barrow, Prime Minister of Belize, to the Chairman of the ICC, Mr. Shashank Manohar, there would be further communication with the ICC advising of the intended course of action of the Community.

Heads of Government also agreed that the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago would be a member of the Prime Ministerial Sub-Committee on Cricket.

BORDER ISSUES:

Belize-Guatemala Relations

Heads of Government received an update on the most recent developments between Belize and Guatemala.

Heads of Government expressed concern that the undertaking by both countries and the Organization of American States (OAS), to engage in the design and development of a mechanism of co-operation for the Sarstoon River, remains outstanding and urged both countries and the OAS to redouble their efforts in this respect.

They noted that in accordance with the Special Agreement to Submit Guatemala's Claim to the International Court of Justice, Guatemala is preparing to hold its referendum on 15th April 2018 on whether to submit their claim on Belize to the International Court of Justice for a final resolution, and expressed their hope that both countries will continue advancing their efforts to fulfill all their obligations under that Agreement.

Heads of Government expressed support for the continuous and critical role of the OAS in the process aimed at resolving the dispute arising from Guatemala's claims on Belize and further called on the international community to continue supporting the OAS Office in the Adjacency Zone.

Heads of Government emphasized their unflinching support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of Belize.

Guyana-Venezuela Relations

The Heads of Government received an update from Guyana on recent developments on the controversy between the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and the decision of the United Nations Secretary General, H.E. Antonio Guterres issued on January 30, 2018, in choosing the International Court of Justice as "the means that is now to be used for the solution to the controversy" between Guyana and Venezuela.

The Heads expressed their full confidence in the decision of the United Nations Secretary General, in exercise of his authority under the Geneva Agreement of 1966.

The Heads of Government reiterated the firm and unequivocal support of the Caribbean Community for the maintenance and preservation of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

CANDIDATURES

Heads of Government endorsed the candidacy of St Vincent and the Grenadines for a seat on the United Nations Security Council for the period 2020-2021.

LEGAL INSTRUMENTS FOR ADOPTION AND SIGNATURE

The Revised Agreement Establishing the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC)

Barbados
Belize
Guyana
Montserrat
St Vincent and the Grenadines

Multilateral Air Services Agreement

Belize
Guyana
St Vincent and the Grenadines

CARICOM Arrest Warrant Treaty

The Bahamas
Barbados

Agreement Establishing the Accreditation Authority in Medicine and other Health Professions

Montserrat

Agreement Establishing the Caribbean Centre for Energy and Energy Efficiency

Montserrat

DATE OF THE THIRTY-NINTH REGULAR MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT OF CARICOM (JULY 2018)

This Meeting is scheduled to be held in Montego Bay, Jamaica on 4-6 July 2018, under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister of Jamaica.

APPRECIATION

Heads of Government thanked the Government and People of Haiti for the excellent arrangements and hospitality which were provided for the successful conduct of the Meeting.