CARPHA Commended for Regional Response to Coronavirus COVID-19 at Heads of Government

Keynote speakers at the Opening of the Thirty–First Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the CARICOM, Barbados, February 18, commended CARPHA for COVID-19 preparedness and response in the Region. Honourable Mia Amor Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados and Chair of the Conference of Heads of Governments of CARICOM singled out CARPHA and other regional institutions for their collaboration towards keeping the threat of the COVID-19 virus out of the Region.

The Chair used the current threat to the Region posed by COVID-19 to demonstrate the benefits of the CARICOM family and taking decisions to confront our challenges.

In his address, Honourable Allen M. Chastanet, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia praised the efforts of CARPHA and the Regional Security System (RSS) for their prompt response to the transport and testing of samples for coronavirus from Saint Lucia. “We are so thankful as a nation to CARPHA and the RSS for going above and beyond,” said the outgoing Chairman of CARICOM. He further stated “This reminds us of the importance of being part of a union; being part of a group that in times of emergency has your back. You had Saint Lucia’s back and we thank you. This is what being part of CARICOM is about.” Hon. Allen Chastanet lauded the Region’s response to the novel Coronavirus as “regionalism working”.

Ambassador Irwin LaRocque, Secretary-General CARICOM, applauded the health emergency response mechanism engineered by CARPHA to keep the Community free of COVID-19. He told delegates that the Region has “adopted a pro-active approach” to the threat. This included the convening of an Emergency Meeting of the Ministers of Health on the virus, with participation from the CARPHA, the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA).

Secretary-General LaRocque said the inter-agency collaboration that is taking place is another example of the co-ordination required to address the challenges to integration, stating “We all must do our part to stave off the epidemic of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases and the spread of the global viruses that threaten to engulf us.”

The speakers emphasised the need for the Community to act in concert in order to overcome the challenges posed both within and from outside of the Region. The theme of CARICOM “as a family’ threaded through the presentations, along with praise for the regional institutions led by the CARPHA, and PAHO as well as the CARICOM Secretariat for the co-ordination of the response to the Coronavirus.

During the first day of the 2-day meeting, Heads of Government considered a Regional Approach to the Coronavirus – COVID-19. They received a detailed briefing from CARPHA on the actions being taken throughout the Region to prevent the importation and transmission of the COVID-19 Virus. The Heads recognised that the risk of importation of the virus in the Region remains relatively low that an outbreak could reverse economic gains of CARICOM States.
The Heads of Government welcomed the communications strategy developed by CARPHA to increase public knowledge on actions being taken to prevent importation and or transmission of the virus in the Region. They noted that the strategy was important to counter myths and misinformation thereby reducing potential social media hysteria associated with the fear of an outbreak in CARICOM Members.

Heads of Government welcomed the efforts by China to assist students and other CARICOM citizens in that country who cannot return home at this time. They mandated the CARICOM Secretariat in collaboration with CARPHA, to explore the offer from China to provide support to the Region to address possible gaps in their response should any case of the COVID-19 be found.

The 31st Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM took place at the Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Centre in St Michael, Barbados from 18th to 19th February 2020.

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