

**STATEMENT  
AT THE CONCLUSION  
OF THE  
SEVENTEENTH SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF  
HEADS OF GOVERNMENT OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY  
(CARICOM) ON PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGES  
PORT-OF-SPAIN**

**TRINIDAD**

**4 NOVEMBER, 2014**

Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) met in special session in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 4 November, 2014, for deliberations on the two current public health challenges facing the Community: Ebola Virus Disease (EVD); and the Chikungunya outbreak.

Heads of Government expressed considerable concern, not just in relation to the possible health impact of the Ebola Virus Disease, but also about the disruption a single case could cause in the economic and social life in our Region. The Heads of Government emphasized that the responses to the diseases must be a Community effort. No Member State of CARICOM must battle these public health challenges on its own.

The Community's responses to the two public health challenges are being coordinated by the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA).

**Ebola**

The Meeting accepted that the likelihood of penetration of the Ebola Virus Disease in the Region is low, based on the low level of traffic from affected areas. While there have been no reported cases of EVD

in the Region, it urged the strengthening of the Regional Public Health capacity to confront the possibility of an outbreak of Ebola and any other future public health challenge(s).

The Meeting endorsed the measures taken so far by CARPHA, the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Secretariat and the Government of Cuba, to establish and strengthen Regional capabilities to confront Ebola. The Heads of Government extended the Region's condolences to those affected by the disease, expressed solidarity with international efforts to support the affected West African countries and wished a speedy reversal of the epidemic.

The Heads of Government adopted the following **10-Point Plan of Action to *Stop Ebola There and Here***:

1. **strengthen** effective, coordinated measures at ports of entry to prevent Ebola from entering our Community, including harmonising travel restrictions;
2. **strengthen health systems** including training, equipment, laboratories and containment, and enlist the participation of airlines in the Region in transporting specimens and response teams;
3. **create a Regional Rapid Response Team** (*Carib REACT*) able to reach any Member State in twenty-four (24) hours to support the national response team to contain/stop an outbreak early on;
4. **launch an intensive public education campaign** for citizens of the Region, visitors and those outside;
5. **organize a comprehensive resource mobilisation effort including a possible Stop Ebola There and Here (SETH) Fund**, to which governments, citizens and businesses here and abroad may donate;
6. **finalise** and implement the harmonised regional operational response plan by end-November, coordinated with national response plans;
7. **participate** in capacity-building efforts at the global and regional levels to gain experience for our benefit;
8. **establish a Regional Coordinating Mechanism on Ebola (RCME) with CARPHA as Chair**, including the CARICOM and OECS Secretariats, IMPACS, CDEMA, and inviting Cuba to participate, The RCME will report to the Lead Head of

- Government on Health, the Hon. Dr. Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis, with the immediate responsibility to develop a comprehensive Regional Strategy to address Ebola preparedness in collaboration with PAHO/WHO;
9. **invite PAHO/WHO, the United Nations, other development partners and contributors** to a meeting within one (1) month to expand the effectiveness of our collective response;
  10. **review and reinforce the effectiveness of these measures** as implemented, at the Intersessional Meeting of Conference in February 2015, and again at the Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government in July 2015;

The Heads of Government agreed on the need for enhanced coordination of the measures proposed in the 10-point plan with clear responsibilities accorded to Regional Institutions and International Organisations based on competencies.

The Meeting mandated CARPHA to complete the national assessments in collaboration with PAHO/WHO and other International Development Partners and to develop a more comprehensive estimate of the resource requirements of the Region to support an enhanced resource mobilization plan.

The meeting also recognized the significant role that Cuba can play in boosting the Regional response and urged that this long-standing and valuable regional partner be urgently and integrally involved in the RCME.

## **Chikungunya**

With regard to Chikungunya, the first known cases in the Americas were on the island of Saint Martin/Sint Maarten in December 2013. CARPHA predicted widespread transmission bearing in mind the Caribbean's susceptible population, abundant *Aedes aegypti* vector mosquitos, and frequent travel. Soon afterward, additional cases were reported in other countries in the Caribbean Region, and the disease spread at the rate of one country every one to two weeks. As of 27 October, 2014, cases of Chik-V had been confirmed in 23 of 24 CARPHA Member States (CMS).

Ministries of Health and CARPHA, with the collaboration of PAHO/WHO,

and partners such as, the US Centres for Disease Control (CDC) and French Institute Pasteur, have been working assiduously to control the epidemic. However, spread has continued with temporary economic disruption in some countries.

Against this background, chief among the decisions that the Heads of Government have taken are:

1. that there must be a multi-sectoral approach to fighting the disease that would include education, tourism, media, local government and other sectors and capabilities, including private enterprises, and explore the use of new technologies
2. that there must be a well-coordinated, continuous public education campaign on how the disease is spread, targeting the citizenry, travelers, and tourism stakeholders
3. the strengthening of vector control response capacity
4. the facilitation by PAHO/WHO of Bulk purchase of essential public health supplies, such as bed nets, insecticides and repellent

The Heads of Government also mandated a partnership among CARPHA, the CARICOM Secretariat and PAHO/WHO to establish an annual 'Caribbean Mosquito Awareness Week' to facilitate education and vector control.

The Heads of Government extended their appreciation to the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago for the excellent arrangements that were put in place at short notice for hosting this very important Special Meeting.