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BARBADOS AND CARPHA LAUNCH THE BARBADOS TOURISM AND HEALTH PROGRAMME

Barbados and The Caribbean Public Health Agency launch the Barbados Tourism and Health Programme to protect the health and well-being of locals and visitors

Bridgetown, Barbados November 15, 2016- The Ministries of Tourism and Health in Barbados in collaboration with the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) launched a national initiative- *Regional Tourism Health Information, Surveillance, Monitoring and Response Systems and Standards to Enhance Sustainable Tourism Project*- to protect the health and well-being of locals and visitors on November 14, at the Hilton Barbados Resort.

This is part of a regional tourism and health project, which promotes sustainable and profitable tourism in the Caribbean. Given the island's high dependency upon tourism, Barbados is pleased to be a part of this regional project, jointly funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

The genesis of this project lies in the fact that the health of Caribbean economies, including Barbados', is closely related to the health of its tourism industry given that the Caribbean is the most tourism-dependent region in the world. Enhancing sustainable tourism will promote economic development, poverty eradication and improvement of quality of life in Barbados.

However, tourism growth and sustainability in the Caribbean are facing Health, Safety and Environmental Sanitation (HSE) threats, including disease outbreaks/crises and deficiencies in environmental sanitation, contributing to declined tourist arrivals. The consequences of reduced visitor arrivals for those Barbadians whose livelihoods depend on the sector can be serious and possibly contribute to an adverse economic and social burden.

Inadequate health monitoring and response systems, the absence of standards and certification and the lack of training have contributed to the spread of disease outbreaks, food safety and environmental sanitation issues in the region. Without adequate information management systems, standards and associated training, these HSE threats can become a severe tourism crisis. It is critical therefore that to sustain Caribbean tourism, efforts must be made to monitor and respond to travel related illnesses. Support must be given to the tourism sector to promote the adoption of sound health and environmental sanitation practices.

Speaking at the launch, Chief Medical Officer Dr. Joy St. John noted that, “key objectives of this project include the development of a Regional Tourism Health Information, Surveillance, Monitoring and Response System, improvements to the existing health safety and environmental standards, and capacity building in key areas of food safety and environmental sanitation.”

Dr. St. John also noted that the project will result in fewer and less costly outbreaks and a more effective response to existing challenges occurring in the tourism industry. It will promote a healthier, safer, more reputable tourism product on the global stage for both locals and visitors, as well as strengthen regional safety and security.

This project will be implemented by CARPHA from 2016-2018 in 6 countries including The Bahamas, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados. The Ministries of Tourism and Health are therefore pleased to be selected to be a part of this project, as we seek to enhance both our tourism product and public health responses.

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