

**JOINT STATEMENT OF THE ELEVENTH GENERAL MEETING BETWEEN
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY AND
THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM
21 and 22 July 2021**

1. The Eleventh General Meeting between the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and its Associated Institutions and the United Nations (UN) system was held online on 21 and 22 July 2021. The overarching objective was addressing the challenges and seizing the opportunities for enhancing the partnership between CARICOM and Associated Institutions and the UN system. Opening remarks were given by the Secretary-General of CARICOM, His Excellency Irwin LaRocque, and by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres. Permanent Representatives from CARICOM member States attended the inaugural and closing sessions.

2. The meeting was attended by 130 participants including representatives of the CARICOM Secretariat and its Associated Institutions, and representatives of the UN system. It was co-chaired by the Assistant Secretary-General for Foreign and Community Relations of CARICOM, Ambassador Colin Granderson, and by the Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas, Miroslav Jenča, and the Director of the Americas Division, Laura Flores, of the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA).

3. Secretary-General António Guterres, in his remarks, pointed out that the two years since the last general meeting had proved to be one of the most difficult periods in the history of both organizations. He underscored the need for equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and called on the international community to urgently help countries in dire financial distress tackle both short and medium-term debt and liquidity challenges. He also advocated for financial and technical support to confront the effects of climate change. He thanked CARICOM for its unwavering support to the United Nations Mission in Haiti and welcomed its willingness to play a role in facilitating a national dialogue.

4. Secretary-General Irwin LaRocque, in his remarks, said that the Caribbean region was still grappling with the effects of the pandemic. He then referred to the situation in Haiti following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and reiterated that CARICOM was willing to facilitate a national dialogue. He pointed out that the Caribbean was a natural disaster-prone area and had been recently hit by hurricane Elsa, floods in Guyana and Suriname and the volcanic eruption in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. He highlighted the need to incorporate a multidimensional vulnerability index in the criteria for determining access to concessional development financing. He added that financing should be made available before disaster struck. He further highlighted that in this difficult present context there was a need to continue enhancing the long-standing partnership between CARICOM and the UN.

5. CARICOM provided an overview of developments in the Community while the UN presented an overview of challenges facing the Caribbean countries. It was highlighted that the meeting was an opportunity to agree on responses to challenges and identify key actors and follow-up actions. Participants discussed the need to strengthen the CARICOM-UN partnership to overcome the emergency created by the COVID-19 pandemic, enhance the preparedness to

confront the ever-increasing negative effects of natural disasters and take advantage of development opportunities for the Caribbean States. Presenters highlighted the pandemic's disproportionate effects on women, youth and children, the latter being especially challenged by inadequate access to devices and internet connectivity to continue their education from home. It was noted that, in spite of the pandemic, Caribbean countries were able to hold successful elections and recognition was made of DPPA's electoral support to some countries. The meeting further noted the continuing engagement of the UN with the region, including through the work of the UN Resident Coordinators, who participated in the meeting, and the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) under the co-vicechairs, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations, Development Programme (UNDP) which brought together 24 UN entities working on development to support countries achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development across all three pillars of the UN system. The RCP provides opportunity for the UN and CARICOM to have more substantive engagements in critical areas such as building economic and environmental resilience, including resilience to climate change and natural disasters. Joint Programmes (23) were a rising feature of the collaboration, including on gender-based violence and family violence prevention. The usefulness of the UN Multi Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (MCSDF) as an instrument to advance a multisectoral agenda, in line with State's international human rights obligations, was recognized.

6. On enhancing economic recovery, discussions highlighted the challenges posed by the negative economic and financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite CARICOM being relatively successful at containing the virus, the region was confronting the severity of the economic fallout from the pandemic. Concerns about increasing levels of unemployment, particularly among women and youth, and rising debt in a context of exceptionally challenging economic conditions were raised by participants. The meeting acknowledged areas of partnership between CARICOM and the UN, such as ICAO Aviation recovery measures and guidance for CARICOM to implement this recovery in an orderly, regional and sustainable matter. Structural weaknesses in the Caribbean economies became more evident because of the pandemic. Beyond concessional finance and debt relief, the region needed innovative financing sources to build a platform for a robust and resilient society. It was recognized that debt sustainability and food and nutrition security was a critical and pressing issue for the Community. Moreover, the revitalization and resuscitation of tourism, the most affected productive sector in CARICOM, is critical to the recovery of the region's economies. Similarly, to reactive tourism and support COVID-19 vaccine access as means for the economic recovery and socioeconomic development, the UN and CARICOM agreed on the continuous joint work on air and maritime transport matters.

7. Participants acknowledged the importance of CARICOM fast-tracking the development of the Single ICT space and the action plan as part of a digital transformation strategy and platform for socio-economic transformation in CARICOM that would create regional socio-economic growth. Participants also acknowledged that SIDS are still 'playing catch up' as it relates to ICT development and that funding as prescribed in key UN meeting outcome documents (e.g. the World Summit on the Information Society, WSIS) has not been forthcoming. The meeting acknowledged areas of partnership between CARICOM and the UN, such as a UN Digital Transformation Group for CARICOM to promote dialogue and moving from 'plans to action', the ECLAC's Debt Swap Initiative and the Caribbean Resilience Fund, and the call for a multi-dimensional vulnerability index, among others. Regional integration remained the best platform to

address the ongoing challenges, including safeguarding critical sectors such as infrastructure, tourism, food production, fisheries and air transportation. Participants underscored that an automatic debt service suspension mechanism was needed, particularly in situations of objectively verified natural disasters, as well as the use of a multi-dimensional vulnerability index that took into account losses as a result of climate change. Participants further raised the issue of state capacity to implement recommendations from international bodies and the importance of capacity building, including for strengthening the science-policy interface.

8. On promoting social resilience and advancing citizen wellbeing, it was underscored that the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the complex, interconnected and systemic nature of risks that have disrupted the normal functioning of society in the region. The urgent need for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines was emphasized. The Caribbean, in addition to being exposed to natural hazards, had to confront unprecedented migratory inflows that required countries in the region to strengthen efforts to reduce existing physical and social vulnerabilities. Participants recognised the need to address regional health challenges such as non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and HIV/aids while strengthening the capacity for preparedness and response to disease pandemics.

9. The meeting highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic had tested the social resilience of countries in the Caribbean more than ever. Participants opined that education, as a driver for economic resilience, was playing an important role in recovery efforts and that it was time to reimagine education and expanding digital learning especially in remote areas. The Caribbean School Safety Initiative was an instrument towards building human capital but due to the pandemic education, health, gender equality and inclusion objectives were not met and had been highly compromised. The need for a regional approach towards developing local capacity for specialized training was emphasized. The meeting recognized the need to support the CARICOM Human Resource Development Strategy to prevent brain drain and to consider the different UN human capacity development supporting initiatives offered by its agencies such as UNICEF, ICAO, and others. The important role of the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) was also underlined by participants. The meeting underscored the highest importance of working towards achieving gender equality and youth and children development while addressing income inequality and low participation of women in the labour force and in politics. It was agreed that the CARICOM Secretariat would continue working with the UN to strengthen public health and to advance regional development.

10. On promoting green recovery and building environmental resilience, participants raised their concern that climate change presented a profound threat to the region's economies, health and wellbeing. The Caribbean was the most tourism-dependent region in the world, and, with tourism infrastructure located mostly in the coastal zone, countries were extremely vulnerable to climate-induced disasters. Participants recognized the relevance of the revision of the Caribbean Regional Strategy on Climate Change and Development. The meeting acknowledged that advancing climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction was a main area of cooperation between the two organizations. It was mentioned that the Bridgetown Declaration at the XXII Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean called for action on the environmental dimension of COVID-19 sustainable development recovery and for the implementation of ecosystem-based approaches that provided for adaptation, mitigation and conservation of biodiversity. Participants mentioned the importance of implementing the legal

regime for oceans as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and related documents, as well as the need for cooperation in developing effective ocean governance frameworks and management tools.

11. The need to rebuild in a more resilient and sustainable manner was discussed, with references to the green and blue economies and early warning systems. The meeting underscored the need for the post-COVID socio-economic recovery to be climate and disaster risk informed and promoting nature-based solutions and social protection. The importance of identifying capacity-building activities and establishing a roadmap to operationalize the CARICOM-UN partnership was raised. Areas of cooperation, such as the conduct of vulnerability assessments; the identification of gender-sensitive adaptation and disaster-risk reduction solutions; support in accessing multilateral funds and the facilitation of exchange of experiences and South-South learning, among others, were discussed. The meeting further considered the need to secure a resilient energy sector that would be more resistant to extreme weather events that particularly affected small island developing states.

12. **On safer societies and good governance**, it was recalled that the Latin American and Caribbean region, characterized by a low-growth trajectory, high inequality and high vulnerability, remained one of the most violent regions in the world in the absence of war. In the area of crime and citizen security, the meeting discussed that the region faced challenges such as strengthening the judicial systems, vulnerability due to porous borders, armed violence and significant levels of crime. The violence against children was high in the region and the impact of corporal punishment both at home and at school was concerning. Participants mentioned that CARICOM-UN cooperation could focus on collaboration and partnerships towards reforming the criminal justice system, improving institutional capacity, combatting corruption and increasing women's participation in decision making processes, among others. It was also noted that UNDP, in collaboration with other UN agencies was supporting CARICOM countries in justice reform, enhancing governance systems and improving citizen security.

13. On cybercrime, the meeting identified challenges affecting countries in the region such as the need to develop human and technological capacities. Participants raised the necessity of having in place an institutional framework to develop policies and strategies to counter cybercrime, including enhancing cybersecurity and reducing vulnerability of data on mobility and migration (passport control). The UN is in a position to provide capacity building and technical assistance and could act as an enabler to coordinate contacts between justice operators, technology companies and international partners such as Interpol. On human mobility, it was mentioned that migration flows, in particular refugees and migrants from Venezuela, had increased exponentially during the last years. The UN could provide cooperation on border management systems, return and reintegration, migration data collection, international protection to refugees and combatting trafficking of persons, among other areas. The important role of CARICOM within the Caribbean Migration Consultations (CMC) process was noted.

14. **On data availability for effective policy making**, ECLAC provided an overview of the current situation in the Caribbean, pointing out that there was a general scarcity of data and socio-economic and environment indicators, as well as an infrequent and insufficient production and dissemination of official statistics and indicators. Statistical capacity had received positive

attention within CARICOM, and assistance was provided by UN agencies, funds and programmes. Participants mentioned that data collection, processing and dissemination could be greatly improved by the use of modern technologies and tools, and that there was a need to develop capacity in the use of Big Data in official statistics. Non-traditional data sources were increasingly integrated in official statistics, including administrative data, Big Data and citizen-generated data. Questions were raised on how to address the lack of political will to develop sensitive data, innovations in data ecosystems capitalizing on technology focusing on more frequent and disaggregated routine data as well as the need to collect and process historical data available in non-digital format.

15. In the closing session, the UN High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States briefed participants about challenges and opportunities to strategically addressing the multidimensional crises affecting the region, and how the multifaceted recovery effort needed to include enhanced blue, green, and digital economies, as well as initiatives to assist the region with managing its high levels of debt.

16. In concluding, participants agreed to hold smaller, focused follow-up meetings between the two organisations during the two-year period between the 11th and the 12th General Meetings, that would allow for the identification of more specific goals and associated actions, as well as more in-depth discussions on specific clusters of topics. These intersessional meetings would fulfill a common aspiration of strengthening collaboration between the Secretariats of the two organisations.

29 July 2021