

V5 Statement on behalf of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and Barbados at World Health Assembly 73 May 2020

Delivered by: Hon Minister Molwyn Joseph, Minister for Health Antigua and Barbuda.

Theme: COVID-19 Pandemic

Mr President

Director General,

Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Honourable Ministers of Health,

Heads and members of delegations

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is my honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the delegations of the OECS and Barbados.
2. The Eastern Caribbean region watched the global pandemic of COVID-19 unfold and with great concern, particularly because of the high risk of severe disease related to our high burden of chronic noncommunicable diseases.
3. When the first cases were imported, the region took swift and decisive action to contain the spread of the disease relying on basic public health measures of hygiene, quarantine, detection, contact tracing, isolation, physical distancing, and travel restrictions.
4. Containment works! All countries in the region were able to “flatten the curve”.
5. However, the needed response to the public health crisis has resulted in the related economic and social crises.
6. International travel restrictions and strict physical-distancing protocols have devastated tourism and other economic sectors.
7. On average, tourism contributes to over 50% of GDP and nearly 40% of employment across the region.
8. Given the inter-connectedness of our economies to countries in Europe and North America, our ability to respond to the pandemic is inextricably linked to the success of measures taken outside our shores

9. The region's response is further constrained by a fragile macroeconomic climate and high levels of external debt, contraction in donor support and the threat of natural disasters.
10. We are still recovering from the devastating impact of hurricanes in 2017 and the new season begins in two (2) weeks.

Mr. President

11. To ensure our small states are not left behind, the region calls on global partnerships to address the following needs for Covid-19 and Beyond:
 - a. Access to financing and debt forgiveness to allow the region to effectively address the fallout of the pandemic; and to support vulnerable populations, households, and businesses.
 - b. Continued support of PAHO and WHO to strengthen health systems and support transitioning to appropriate technologies including digital and telemedicine solutions
 - c. Access to currently needed supplies for COVID-19 response and **equal** access to emerging rapid tests, medicines, vaccines, and technologies
 - d. Development of relevant protocols for reopening of the economies including the hospitality and cruise industries.
12. We would like to take the opportunity to thank PAHO, and several Regional Agencies in the Caribbean Community including
 - the Caribbean Public Health Agency CARPHA,
 - the Caribbean Disaster Management Agency CDEMA,
 - the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security IMPACS
 - the Regional Security System RSS
 - the University of the West Indies UWIfor their continued and invaluable support.

(433 words- 4minutes for regional statement.)