



Closing Remarks

by

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and

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Eleventh General Meeting Between the Caribbean Community and Associated Institutions and the United Nations System

Excellencies,

Colleagues,

Distinguished Delegates,

Let me thank you first and foremost for your contributions to this dialogue on addressing challenges and identifying areas for partnerships between CARICOM and the UN system.

Our deliberations have offered valuable insights into the common challenges SIDS in the Caribbean are confronted with. These include advancing economic recovery, promoting social and climate resilience, and accelerating human development.

Importantly, our meeting has also highlighted potential solutions for addressing these multidimensional vulnerabilities, including the

deepening of partnerships between CARICOM and the UN system.

Distinguished Delegates,

It is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on practically every sphere of life within the Caribbean.

Prospects for recovery remain unclear, with the region grappling with low economic growth rates and high debt service payments. The tourism sector continues to struggle, and access to concessional financing remains restricted. Fiscal space is also limited, impeding efforts to tackle socio-economic challenges including increased access to vaccines,

strengthening education and health systems, and building resilience in the agriculture systems.

The economic impact on the Caribbean economies comes in combination with the increasingly adverse effects of climate change and attendant disasters.

And here let me say that my thoughts go to all affected by the recent storms and volcanic eruptions in the Caribbean, particularly the most vulnerable including women, children and the elderly. This underscores the fact that we cannot look at challenges in isolation but must consider, in a holistic manner, the structural vulnerabilities of the region.

With regard to addressing the impacts of COVID-19 and the pathways to recovery, we need to do more. The urgency of our actions must match the needs on the ground. The entire UN system must be mobilized to work with CARICOM to ensure a multifaceted recovery effort. We need to stimulate the type of investment that provides for a sustainable future, which includes enhancing the blue, green and digital economies. We must also support the urgent advancement of the regional integration process, which is necessary for post-COVID recovery and the transition to more inclusive and sustainable development.

We cannot address the economic and financial recovery of the region without examining the

impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism and health sectors, and the ripple effects on commerce, distribution and employment, as well as on transportation, agriculture, fisheries and other sectors.

We need practical action plans, including gender responsive strategies, to resuscitate these key sectors. The tourism sector will need particular attention in both the short and long-term. A swift and carefully planned reopening of the industry will be essential to ensuring full economic recovery. CARICOM-UN collaboration is key in this regard.

Further, the pandemic has also exacerbated the severe financial constraints that SIDS are

currently facing. The region is in desperate need of liquidity to respond to its emergency short-term needs. It is also important to secure long-term development finance to advance the structural transformation needed to reposition CARICOM economies for a sustained resilient recovery. In this regard, re-capitalizing multilateral and regional development banks, replenishing international climate funds and simplifying the modalities of access to these banks and climate funds will be required.

The UN will also continue its advocacy work in this regard. We are calling on countries that have the borrowing space and are not in need of additional reserves to voluntarily reallocate their shares of the much anticipated new

issuance of SDRs to the poorer and most vulnerable countries, including SIDS.

We also strongly encourage a CARICOM-UN partnership that enables countries to develop new and innovative financing mechanisms, and to modernize the regional financial sector.

We need to expand eligibility to concessional financing based on a well-defined multidimensional vulnerability index.

I note, in this context, the valuable work of the CDB on the monitoring of Multidimensional Vulnerability and their participation in the UN system's consultative process on the potential development of an MVI for SIDS. We look

forward to collaborating with CDB and CARICOM to promote increased access to concessional finance based on a potential MVI.

In the same vein, we need sustainable debt solutions for SIDS in the Caribbean, including comprehensive debt relief. CARICOM countries are unlikely to achieve the economic development required to achieve the goals of the SAMOA Pathway and the 2030 Agenda given current high levels of debt servicing. We need therefore to explore, in practical terms, initiatives related to debt suspensions, and innovative debt swaps. We also need to find long-term solutions related to the international debt architecture – debt restructuring solutions that are effective in dealing not only with Paris

Club and non-Paris Club bilateral creditors, but also with private creditors.

We will continue to push for these solutions for SIDS, particularly Caribbean SIDS, including in the context of the Financing for Development process.

Distinguished Delegates,

The pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for accelerated technological innovation to enable CARICOM countries to access and reap benefits associated with remote learning, tele-medicine, e-commerce and e-governance.

Digital transformation requires investment in digital infrastructure, including widespread

access to broadband internet and electronic devices, as well as improvement in digital skills and local content.

The UN will work with CARICOM on strategies to mainstream digital technologies and processes in government administration, commerce, health, education, as well as in relation to disaster risk reduction and other activities. These strategies must be supported by improved education and training to optimize the productivity-enhancing potential of digital technologies.

Ensuring that accessible and quality education and lifelong learning opportunities are available

to all will be essential to accelerating recovery, as well as to achieving the wider development objectives of inclusive economic growth and social development, while building more resilient communities.

The 2022 – 2026 UN Multi-country Sustainable Development Framework (MSDF) provides an excellent opportunity for strengthening our collaboration in this regard.

My Office will also continue to partner with the ITU to facilitate the implementation of policies in SIDS that focus on further investment in improving broadband access, connectivity and uptake.

We can also use the MSDF to collaborate further on building the capacity of our governance institutions, including enhancing policy and legislative frameworks for elections, promoting accountability, improving public service delivery, and increasing public trust in political, economic and social systems. An important element of this work is building data capacities, which is an issue that cuts across all of the key areas of the CARICOM-UN partnership.

The reform of the security-focused approach to crime prevention is also vitally important to address the issue of violent crime and civilian safety in the Caribbean, and to improve the safety and security for all. The UN is indeed

committed to promote and coordinate international cooperation between relevant stakeholders in this area.

Distinguished Delegates,

As the ongoing threat of climate change becomes more severe, supporting resilient and robust environmental development is now more crucial than ever. This cannot be achieved without the development of innovative and efficient renewable energy systems, and carefully planned disaster risk reduction measures.

A strong CARICOM-UN partnership must also support the development of sustainable ocean-based economies in the region.

My Office will support the region in meeting its capacity-building needs and cultivating a coherent, inclusive and enabling environment for multi-stakeholder partnerships, including through the OHRLLS supported SIDS Global Business Network (GBN).

The SIDS GBN has organized several Virtual Forums over the last year on different issues under the overall theme of oceans. It was encouraging to see so many innovative partnerships initiated in relation to ocean energy, fisheries and sustainable tourism.

Going forward, we need to work together to ensure that these partnerships are nurtured and expanded to other sectors critical to resilience building and sustainable development.

The SIDS GBN is also producing an assessment report on partnerships with the private sector in SIDS, geared to achieving SDG 14 on healthy oceans. This report will be launched this Autumn and will provide an overview of partnerships in SIDS ocean industries.

Distinguished Delegates,

This Decade for Action has gotten off to a challenging start, and so transformative and

concrete measures are required, which takes account of lessons learned from the limited progress over the last decade on key challenges such as climate change, debt sustainability and healthy oceans.

Moving forward, we must enhance the synergies with the SAMOA Pathway, which focuses on the unique vulnerabilities of SIDS, and provides for the development of SIDS' specific approaches and solutions.

The last two days have certainly identified much for us to carry forward in the context of our partnership. We look forward to systematic and strategic follow-up toward with a view to achieving concrete outcomes from our work.

OHRLLS is dedicated to strengthening the relationship with CARICOM and we are open to any suggestions on how we can strengthen our collaboration in the future.

In our role as advocates for SIDS and coordinators of the UN system's support for the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway, we will continue to facilitate interregional learning and partnerships among all SIDS. We will continue to provide platforms for such work, including the Inter Agency Working Group on SIDS, the SIDS National Focal Points mechanism and the SIDS Partnerships Framework.

I close by thanking you once again for your instructive presentations and active and

engaged participation. The time is now for the UN and CARICOM to boost its cooperation to get the region back on track to achieving the 2030 Agenda, and to recover effectively from what has been the worst economic contraction in the Latin America and Caribbean region in over a century.

I look forward to working with you to seize the opportunity to realise our aspirations for sustainable development and progress.

I thank you all.