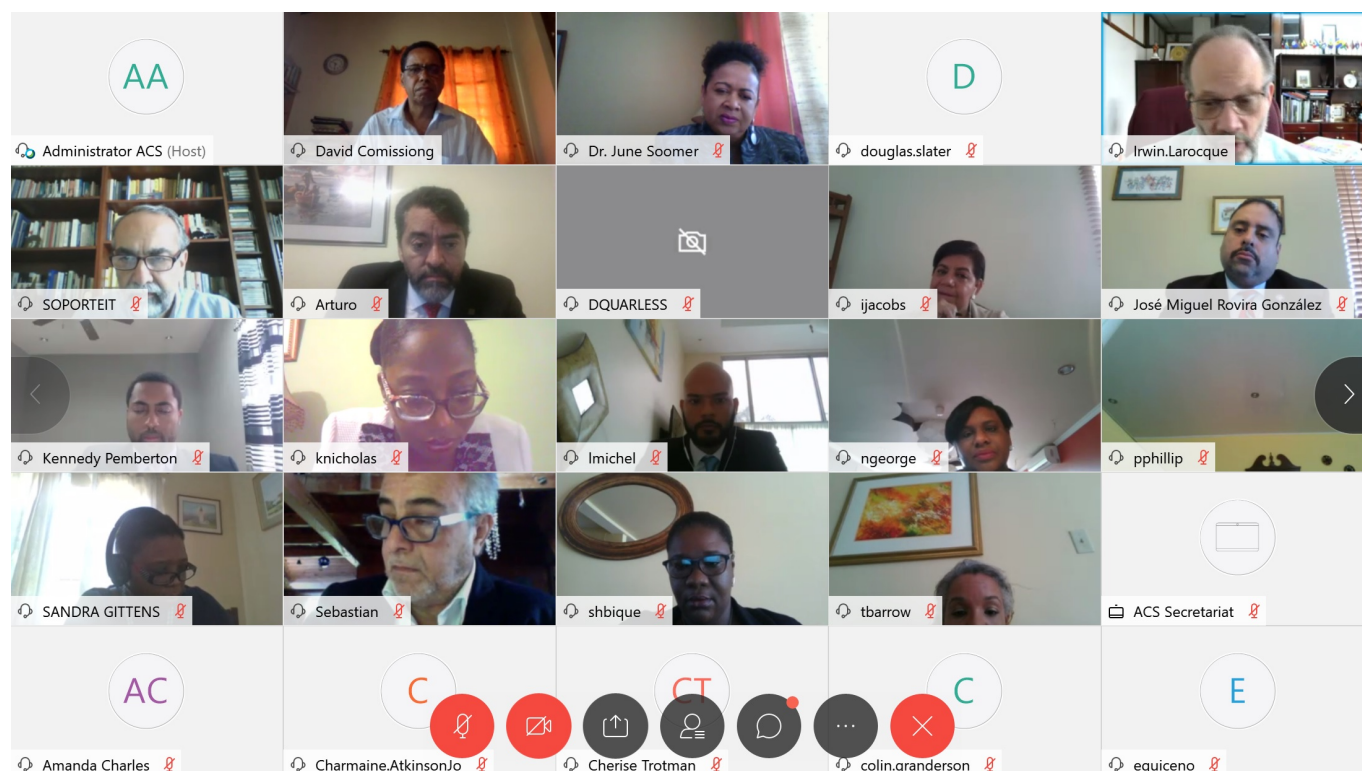


Founding Observers Exchange Initiatives, to Coordinate COVID-19 Response



ACS Founding Observer Organisations Exchange Initiatives, to Coordinate COVID-19 Response

07/04/2020

Port-of-Spain

The six regional Founding Observer organisations of the Greater Caribbean's Association of Caribbean States (ACS) have met to exchange experiences and initiatives, with the aim of better coordinating the Region's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Secretaries General and Ambassadors raised concerns related to the coronavirus in the region. Among the issues raised by the ACS, SICA, CARICOM, UNECLAC, SELA, CTO and SIECA were: the pending threat of Hurricane Season 2020, regional supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and medical supplies, securing regional food supplies and the protection of vulnerable groups.

The ACS held its first Extraordinary Inter-Secretariat Meeting of Founding Observers via videoconference and representative of the Chair of the ACS Ministerial Council, Ambassador David Comissioning commended the Region for how it has acquitted itself in handling this existential crisis thus far, he however urged that the Region "stay the course", maintaining the ethic of leaving no citizen, city or country in the Region behind. He added: "it is such a comfort to know that in these very troubling times, we can call upon the help of our Founding Observer organisations. I think the very fact that we are having this meeting to coordinate our efforts is testimony to the seriousness and very high level of organisation with which our region has approached the COVID-19 crisis."

ACS Secretary General Dr. June Soomer highlighted the importance of sharing each Founding Observer's experiences. "Countries are handling their situations differently, but I believe that we can share the resources for us to be able to manage better. We need an inventory of all the region's resources in one place. We definitely have to look to each other for food security and protection of vulnerable populations. Elderly people are becoming infected. Young people are losing jobs, how are we going to deal with these issues. We must have a humanitarian corridor to ensure that critical

resources go across borders more effectively.”

CARICOM Secretary General Irwin LaRocque said the uncertainty of how long the coronavirus will continue to affect the region poses a challenge. “Particularly for us in the Eastern Caribbean the fact that the hurricane season is approaching is of much concern and not knowing how long the COVID virus will remain with us, projections carry us beyond July, the hurricane season is of great concern. We are planning a comprehensive response to this situation that we are facing. SG LaRocque also praised the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) for its yeoman service, especially to the countries that do not have testing abilities. He also raised the issue of shortages noting that there might be some critical challenges regarding the availability of test kits, reagents, and protective gear, as globally countries are not willing to make these supplies available.

Jorge Cabrera, Advisor to the Secretary General of the Central American Integration System (SICA) said that, after a meeting of their leaders, the bloc of Central American countries and the Dominican Republic have established a Regional Contingency Plan including health and risk management among other areas. “We have a mechanism in the region, to find better offers and to buy medicines, medical supplies and equipment, etcetera, as a group of countries. We are making a regional purchase under the request of our national authorities. Considering economies of scale, we could have better prices when we buy together.”

Diane Quarless, Executive Director of the Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean of UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean said that UNECLAC was paying particular attention to the impact COVID-19 is having on the Region’s informal economy. “We are looking at what is happening in the US, and it is not possible for normalcy to be restored unless the pandemic is under control in the United States. So the implication for our economies is something that we are modelling on a three, six and nine-month trajectory.” In the next week, UNECLAC is hosting a meeting of regional Ministers of Social Development to share their work and experiences.

There were also presentations from the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) and the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA). CTO presented on its efforts to ensure that the Caribbean’s tourism sector is ready to be resuscitated after the worst of the pandemic is over and the importance of expanding its “Tourism and Health” programme. SELA welcomed communication and cooperation with other regional organisations and urged a regional-level monitoring of public policies to identify best practices as the Region addresses the current threat and plans for post-COVID recovery.

Established in 1994, the Association of Caribbean States is an organisation for consultation, cooperation and concerted action in the Greater Caribbean. The ACS coordinates the mandates of its 25 Member States and 10 Associate Members. Its work is focused on, but not limited to disaster risk reduction; sustainable tourism, trade, transport and the protection and preservation of the Caribbean Sea.

ACS Founding Observers: Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Latin American Economic System Secretariat (SELA), Central American Integration System (SICA), Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration (SIECA), United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) and the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO).