



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs

(MFCA) ADM: 10/9/1/7

24th January, 2022

Mr. Brian Caesar
Clerk of the Senate (Ag.)
Office of the Parliament
Parliamentary Complex
Cabildo Building
St. Vincent Street
Port of Spain

Dear Clerk of the Senate,

**The Interim Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee
on the response of the Public Authorities to the COVID-19 Pandemic
in Trinidad and Tobago**

I refer to your letter of 30th November, 2021 on the subject at caption and submit the attached response of the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs to the recommendation contained in the **Interim Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the response of the Public Authorities to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago.**

Yours faithfully,

Reita G. Toussaint
Permanent Secretary (Ag.)

**Interim Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee
on the response of the Public Authorities to the COVID-19 Pandemic
in Trinidad and Tobago**

Response of the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs engaged in several initiatives from the very beginning of the pandemic. Several of these initiatives coincided with the Chairmanship of Dr the Honorable Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Participation at Global Events

2. The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs was instrumental in ensuring that the Prime Minister had access to several platforms to voice concerns over vaccine equity and distribution. Some of the more essential fora include the FrontPage Event held by the Atlantic Council in February 2020 and the Special Session of the United Nations Response to the COVID-19 pandemic in which the Prime Minister made a call for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines in November 2020. Further, the Prime Minister, at the 13th Special Emergency Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM called for a Global Vaccine Summit and equitable access for vaccines on January 2021. As a result, the Prime Minister participated at this Global Summit on COVID-19 hosted by the President of the United States in September 2021.

3. Senator the Honorable Dr Amery Browne, Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, also participated at global events to echo and reiterate the call of the Prime Minister. At the inaugural CARICOM Canada Foreign Ministers Group Meeting in February 2021, the Minister raised issues surrounding access to vaccines and discussed Canada's ability to assist. In April 2021 the Minister also participated at the High-Level United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Special Meeting on the vaccine for all. At this meeting, Minister stated the impact of the virus on the developing world and the powerful detrimental effect it had created in these countries. The Minister also joined the Prime Minister at CARICOM 16th Special Emergency Meeting to consider a regional response to the recent surge in infections and deaths caused by the virus in September 2021.

4. The Minister also led the Trinidad and Tobago delegation to the virtual Tenth UK-Caribbean Forum, which was held in March 2021, and during the one day meeting the

Minister made an intervention on behalf of the Caribbean in Session Three – Values and Security on the Agenda Item 11: Defence & Security Cooperation, in which the issues of vaccine access was raised. Senator Browne, also attended the Seventh CARICOM-Japan Ministerial Meeting on July 20, 2021 and articulated the concerns of CARICOM regarding the access to and equitable distribution of vaccines.

5. His Excellency Anthony Phillips-Spencer, Ambassador of Trinidad and Tobago to the United States of America and Permanent Representative of Trinidad and Tobago to the Organisation of American States (OAS), in his capacity as Coordinator of the CARICOM Caucus of Ambassadors and Regional Grouping of CARICOM Permanent Representatives and Missions to the OAS, led the negotiations and consultations on the CARICOM Resolution entitled, “*The Equitable Distribution of COVID-19 Vaccines*,” which was adopted by acclamation at the virtual regular meeting of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS), prior to its adoption at the Permanent Council in February 2021.

6. Representatives of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago attended the Community of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAC) *Ministerial Meeting to Promote Equitable Access to Vaccines and Tools to Address COVID-19 through the ACT Accelerator*, in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO). Officials also attended the Nineteenth CARICOM-Japan Consultation on 9 March 2021, and again highlighted concern about vaccine access and equity.

7. Further, representatives of the Ministry also attended the Community of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAC) Meeting on *Re-Thinking All: Equity in Access to the COVID-19 Vaccine in Latin America and the Caribbean*, which led to CELAC supporting CARICOM’s call for Global Vaccine Summit.

Engagement with Key Persons

8. Under the instructions from the Prime Minister, the Ministry organized and/or facilitated the engagement of the Prime Minister with influential offices in order to ensure the vaccine access of Trinidad and Tobago.

9. On March 25, 2021 and again on 7 April, 2021, The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago met with US Congresswoman Maxine Waters (D-CA), Chairwoman of the House

Committee on Financial Services. One of the key issues discussed at these meetings was the need for the equitable distribution of vaccines.

10. On April 19, 2021, the Prime Minister held talks with Ms. Elizabeth Cameron, Special Assistant to the President of the United States of America and Senior Director for Global Health Security and Biodefense at The White House to again highlight the critical need for the region to have an adequate and urgent supply of vaccines.

11. Minister Browne, in April 2021, participated in a meeting between CARICOM Member States and the US Secretary of State Mr. Antony Blinken, at which the Minister and other CARICOM Member States requested that the Caribbean be considered when the US decided to share its surplus vaccines. On May 7, 2021 CARICOM Foreign Ministers met with Mr. Jake Sullivan, Assistant to US President Biden on National Security Affairs. Discussions focused, inter alia, on the COVID-19 health crisis. CARICOM countries again unanimously called on the US to provide COVID-19 vaccines to Caribbean countries and to leverage its leadership at the multilateral level to advocate for increased assistance to the region to recover from the devastating effects of the pandemic.

12. On September 21, 2021 the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs issued a statement at the Meeting between CARICOM Foreign Ministers and Ms. Wendy R. Sherman, Deputy Secretary of State of the United States, on behalf of CARICOM Foreign Ministers on the issue of COVID-19 vaccines and the crisis facing the region.

During the year, the Minister met with several of the Resident Ambassadors either in order to advocate for vaccines for Trinidad and Tobago or to indicate the urgent of vaccine access and equality.

13. One of the main forms of engagement with High Officials was through the correspondence issued by the Prime Minister to various Heads of Government requesting support on a variety of issues related to the vaccines. During the course of the year, the Prime Minister wrote the Prime Minister of India, the President of the People's Republic of China and, as Chairman of CARICOM, wrote twice to the President of the United States of America, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the Chancellor of Germany and the President of the European Union. The Prime Minister also wrote to the President of Italy to solicit support for the Global Summit.

14. Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley during his Chairmanship of CARICOM also engaged with His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa;

His Excellency Nana Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana; and His Excellency Uhuru Kenyatta, President of the Republic of Kenya. These discussions, with follow-up by the CARICOM Secretariat, led to the inclusion of Trinidad and Tobago and several other CARICOM Member States on the African Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP), through which Trinidad and Tobago and the region were able to access a significant supply of COVID-19 vaccines that would otherwise not be available on the open market.

15. The Minister supported the Prime Minister by also engaging with his counterparts from India and China. These letters sought to secure 250,000 doses of the COVISHIELD vaccine and a minimum of two hundred thousand (200,000) doses of Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccines, respectively. The Minister also transmitted a letter to Mr. Strive Masiyiwa, African Union (AU) Special Envoy on COVID, with regard to vaccine acquisition under the African Medical Supplies Platform. Minister also reached out to his counterparts in CARICOM in order to secure any excess vaccines that could be utilized by Trinidad and Tobago.

16. The Ministry issued a letter from Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs to Dr. Honourable S. Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs of India for the purchase of 250,000 COVISHIELD COVID -19 Vaccines. The Minister wrote his counterpart in India seeking any assistance that can be afforded to Trinidad and Tobago to facilitate swift access for the purchase and receipt from the Serum Institute of 250,000 doses of the COVISHIELD vaccine.

17. Further, the Embassy of Trinidad and Tobago in Beijing provided assistance in initiating discussions with the Chinese company Sinovac, from which a supply of one million doses of the COVID-19 vaccines would be supplied over a one year period.

The Ministry, under the direction of the Minister, acting on a request from the Ministry of Health, issued a Diplomatic Note No. 802 requesting surplus Astra Zeneca vaccines from the Government of Israel. By Note Verbale No. 853 dated 17 May, 2021, the Ministry wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark requesting 250,000 doses of Denmark's stock of their 2.4 million unutilised doses of AstraZeneca vaccines.

Outcome of the actions of the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs

18. These efforts bore fruit with the donation of vaccines from several countries including CARICOM countries as well as the Republic of India, the People's Republic of China, Canada, and the United States of America.

19. During the course of the year, owing to a direct intervention from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, CARICOM member States came to the assistance of Trinidad and Tobago with Barbados gifting 2000 vaccines to Trinidad and Tobago, while St Vincent and the Grenadines donated 16,000 vaccines and Bermuda and Grenada donated 9,000 and 10,000 vaccines, respectively.

20. that Government of India had approved the supply of 40,000 doses of the COVISHIELD vaccine to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as a donation, and following a weather delay, the donation from India arrived on April 13, 2021.

21. Shortly thereafter, the interventions made by both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs with the People's Republic of China resulted in the arrival in May 2021 of 100,000 Sinopharm vaccines donated by China.

22. As a result of the direct intervention of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and the frequent engagements between the Ministry and the Embassy of the United States, the United States Government announced the donation of 305,370 doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to Trinidad and Tobago, out of a total 907,920 to be donated to the CARICOM Region. The United States has also provided medical equipment and Field Hospitals to Trinidad and Tobago.

23. Soon after the donation of the US vaccines, there was the arrival of 108,000 WHO-approved Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines, from the African Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP), the first tranche out of an order of 800,000 made by Trinidad and Tobago through the AMSP, with further tranches to follow, as additional supplies become available.

24. Through its engagement with Canada, Trinidad and Tobago received 40,000 doses of Astra Zeneca vaccines in August 2021. In December 2021, the Ministry arranged for the handover of the second tranche of Pfizer vaccines from the US totaling 204,200 doses.

25. The engagements between the Ministry and the Resident Foreign Missions led, not only to the provision of vaccines, but also to a plethora of medical supplies provided by the United States, China, India, South Korea, Israel and Mexico.