

MESSAGE

from the Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) on the occasion of CARICOM Day 2024

"Today, CARICOM Day 2024, we mark the Fifty-First Anniversary of the signing of the Original Treaty of Chaguaramas with an affirmation of our solidarity and a re-commitment to mutual support in facing adversity. Whether we face joyful or challenging circumstances, a trademark of our enduring integration movement has been unity and a willingness to assist in times of need. Our objective is constant and clear - together, we will build on the gains of regional integration, address the challenges of recovery and sustainable economic growth and development, and shape an inclusive, resilient and thriving Community for all."

(CARICOM Secretariat, Turkeyen, Greater Georgetown, Guyana - 4 July 2024) -

Citizens of the Caribbean Community,

We are marking this Fifty-First Anniversary of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) as several Member States are assessing the extraordinary damage and destruction caused by Hurricane Beryl, the earliest recorded Category 5 hurricane in the Caribbean, and one of the most dangerous weather systems the Region has ever experienced.

In the circumstances, we have had to postpone our Forty-Seventh Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM which was scheduled for Grenada on 3 – 5 July. In Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique have been badly damaged with housing and other infrastructure nearly 100 percent destroyed. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, similar infrastructure on Union Islands, Canouan, Mayreau, and the Tobago Cays have been severely damaged or destroyed. In Barbados, the fisheries sector has been devastated and the livelihoods of fisherfolk will have to be rebuilt from scratch. Initial reports from Jamaica indicate infrastructural damage, blocked roads, flooding, and losses in the agriculture and fishing sectors. We await word on the impact on the Cayman Islands, and possibly on Belize as Beryl crosses the Yucatan Peninsula.

This is a frightening start to what is forecast to be a very active hurricane season. The devastation to our Region has brought sadness to everyone, and I extend deepest sympathies to those who lost family members, livelihoods and property.

CARICOM States have come together and are providing urgent support to each other to as we seek to recover and rebuild. The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) and national disaster management agencies which together coordinate the emergency assessment and response across the Region; the Regional Security System (RSS); and the regional private sector, including the CARICOM Private Sector Organization Inc. (CPSO), have all been rallying to address the needs of those impacted so far, while others stand ready to assist in different ways. I urge that you extend urgent care and assistance to each other in your communities, particularly to the elderly and very young.

The severity of this hurricane underlines the urgency of our ongoing calls to the international community to take action in keeping with previously agreed climate change commitments. The excessive heat experienced earlier this year has warmed the sea, threatening vulnerable marine ecosystems and fuelling storms such as Beryl, and others that are likely to come during this hurricane season, which is still in its early stages. The urgency of keeping 1.5° within reach is clear. Our vulnerable states, which do not cause climate change, continue to bear the disproportionate burden of its consequences. The socioeconomic destruction caused by the extreme intensity of the weather systems that are strengthened by climate change, result in devastating consequences on the lives and livelihoods of our people.

Member States of the Caribbean Community have been experiencing economic recovery over the past few years following the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even as that recovery is being destroyed by the hurricane, the immediate focus has to be on restoring normalcy to our people and communities, and building resilience as we face the rest of this hurricane season, and beyond.

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