

# **DECLARATION BY HEADS OF GOVERNMENT ON CRIME AND VIOLENCE AS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE**

## **TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**18 APRIL 2023**

We the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) meeting in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago on April 17-18, 2023, on the occasion of the Regional Symposium to address Crime and Violence as a public health issue:

**Alarmed by** the epidemic of crime and violence in the Caribbean, fueled by illegal guns and organized criminal gangs, as a threat to our democracy and the stability of our societies;

**Cognizant** of its cost to our social, economic and health systems;

**Determined to ensure** that our people of the Caribbean can exist in an environment of peace and safety;

**Seized of** the urgent need to reverse the normalisation of violence in social interaction and to restore the bonds of social solidarity;

**Convinced** that the multi-faceted nature of violent crime and its pervasive effects require a robust regional response that includes a public health approach, which is an all of society strategy including family, church, academia, cultural and sports personalities, minority political parties and wider civil society is urgently required;

**Acknowledge** the concerns of the people of the Region, that there is a tilting of the balance between the rights of the individual and the public safety interests of the whole of society, which is having a debilitating effect on the rights of the community to live in peaceful societies, particularly given the trend for persons on murder charges to be granted bail;

**Deeply concerned at** the high rate of illegal exportation of guns from the United States of America to the Caribbean Region; and,

**Recalling** the Region's strong and enduring investments to support the United States in its 'War on Drugs', and, given our observation that the gun has become the new drug, as articulated in our separate 18 April 2023 Declaration, we call on the United States of America to reciprocate and join the Caribbean in its 'War on Guns'.

**Agree** to strengthen the development of security as a fourth pillar of the Community so that collectively we can better address the extra-territorial threats to citizen security; including strengthening the capacity of the Community's Security and Justice agencies to adopt and implement a public health approach.

## **WE THE HEADS WILL**

**Undertake** comprehensive overhaul of the criminal justice system to address criminal terrorists with a focus on proactive management of prosecutions, sentencing and the diversion of young people at risk;

**Strengthen** regional forensic capabilities and collaboration among national forensic agencies with a view to improving the quality of evidence and speed the conduct of trials;

**Prepare** regional model legislation to bring greater harmonization and efficiency to the development and revision of national laws;

**Immediately** and effectively implement the CARICOM Arrest Warrant Treaty;

**Augment** the jurisdiction of magistrates, the consideration of defendants' options to judge-only trials, and the intra-regional rotation of judges and magistrates to admit or foster their greater exposure;

**Strengthen** the capacity of the Regional Intelligence Fusion Centre (RIFC) to deliver its mandate through development of agreed protocols for data sharing amongst Member States;

**Reform** our education systems to empower our citizens and better enable their socio-emotional development, in recognition that the social and emotional learning of the child is as important as technical and academic achievements;

**Agree** to ban assault weapons in the region, except for security forces and sporting competitions;

**Agree** to stand with Mexico on its legal action against US gun manufacturers and retailers;

**Establish** an entity under IMPACS to assist in the containment of corruption and financial crimes, including money laundering and cybercrimes, through greater collaboration to harmonise related legislation and operational processes;

**Empower and engage** young people as positive content developers to offset the negative impact of social media and engage with the creative industries to re-engineer culturally acceptable norms;

**Promote** public awareness and education campaigns in our communities, that challenge harmful beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that contribute to crime and violence;

**Work** with all sectors and institutions to improve the equitable access to services and options for rehabilitation and reintegration into society, psychosocial support and

parental education, addressing domestic violence, and integrating mental issues to treat with crime and violence;

**Develop and implement** targeted programmes and strategies to address young vulnerable youth at risk of becoming perpetrators and victims of crime;

**Appoint** an Eminent Person to lead and advise Heads and the Secretariat on further strategies and reforms and on effectively operationalizing the decisions of Heads.

**Issued by the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago on Tuesday, 18 April at the Regional Symposium on Crime and Violence**