

**Caribbean Statement on Initialling of the New OACPS-EU
Partnership Agreement**

April 15, 2021

H.E. George Rebelo Pinto Chikoti, Secretary General of the OACPS;
H.E. Jutta Urpilainen, EU Commissioner for International Partnerships;
H.E. Robert Dussey, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and African
Integration of the Togolese Republic and OACPS Chief Negotiator;
Other colleague Ministers and distinguished representatives.

Good afternoon.

It is an honour to speak on behalf of the Caribbean region on this important occasion. Today's initialling of the OACPS-EU Partnership Agreement constitutes a truly historic moment which signifies the beginning of a new era in the OACPS-EU partnership.

As we mark the formal conclusion of negotiations which began in September 2018, and which were conducted in a constructive and mutually respectful manner, I would like to place on record the Caribbean's appreciation for the leadership provided by Professor Robert Dussey and EU Commissioners Neven Mimica and Jutta Urpilainen, throughout the process that has brought us to this point.

We recognise with gratitude, the expression of solidarity and support evidenced by the close collaboration with the OACPS the hard work of our lead negotiators at the technical level, respective Chief Negotiators of all our regions, as well as the OACPS Secretariat officials. We also applaud our EU negotiating partners for their flexibility and understanding. I also acknowledge the integral contribution made by Guyana, representing our region, at the All-OACPS and regional levels. To have concluded the Post-Cotonou negotiations in the context of the

COVID-19 pandemic with its human, technical and other challenges was no mean feat on both sides. Indeed, it signalled our collective will and firm commitment to finalise our work and facilitate the conclusion of a new Partnership Agreement, despite the odds.

The new OACPS-EU Partnership Agreement heralds a new dawn in the relationship between our two Groups. At the same time, it has preserved the overarching objective of the partnership, namely, the pursuit of sustainable development by buttressing environmental and economic resilience, advancing governance, particularly in the areas of human rights, democracy and by investing in human and social development.

The Caribbean particularly welcomes the renewed commitment to OACPS-EU collaboration in relevant multilateral fora. In this pursuit, we prioritise the full implementation of the both the UN Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. We are also determined to collaborate with the EU on advancing the case for debt solutions for the global South, and the successful advancement of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) negotiations, particularly in the areas of fisheries subsidies, e-commerce, investment facilitation and support for SMEs. Reflective of the myriad developmental challenges facing small island developing states, our region will also work with other island states within the OACPS, and count on full EU support for the development of a global vulnerability index to secure more concessional development financing, particularly from international financial institutions.

The new OACPS-EU Partnership Agreement is being initialled at a time of great adversity. The human and economic toll inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic compels us to urgently apply innovative solutions to build back our economies and to reinforce our respective health systems,

beginning with equitable and affordable access to vaccines. Even as we harness our collective potential to pivot in times of crises and to build resilience, we call on the EU, as one of our main international development partners, to support our recovery efforts as a demonstration of the commitment to swift and effective implementation of this landmark Agreement.

We recognise that implementation of the new Partnership Agreement will require meaningful engagement, not only between the parties, but also with our respective stakeholders – economic operators, trade unions, consumer advocates, NGOs, parliamentarians, academics, youth and women representatives. We therefore keenly look forward to welcoming Commissioner Urpilainen to the Caribbean, as soon as conditions allow, to facilitate both understanding, and ultimately, ownership of this new Partnership Agreement among its intended beneficiaries, namely our peoples.

The Caribbean region is ready to work with all concerned in this collective endeavour.

I thank you.