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News Story

To News Editor

For Immediate Release

Jamaican Prime Minister Calls on Commonwealth To Act on Migration and Development

Prime Minister Bruce Golding of Jamaica has told the Ramphal Commission on Migration and Development meeting at The University of West Indies (UWI) Mona this week (Feb 22-25, 2011), that Commonwealth action on this vital international issue is now urgent and that he will support efforts to place it on the agenda of the forthcoming summit in Australia later this year.

The Prime Minister was accompanied to the meeting by the Hon. Parnell Charles, Minister of Labour and Social Security and Senator the Hon. Marlene Malahoo-Forte, Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade. He told the Commission chaired by former Prime Minister the Most Hon. PJ Patterson that this was an initiative that was “long overdue”. He stressed that migration is going to continue to rise but that there is “a risk of lopsided benefits if there is no partnership between nations of origin and destination.”

The Commission held its third meeting since its establishment in 2009. The primary purpose of the meeting in Jamaica was to review a draft report prepared by Professor Elizabeth Thomas-Hope of The UWI Mona. This report focused on two crucial issues: environmentally induced migration; and the loss of skilled persons from small and least developed states. Commissioners agreed that these issues are especially pertinent to Caribbean and Pacific members of the 54-nation Commonwealth.

In her report, Professor Thomas-Hope examined climate hazards such as drought, sea-level rise and the destruction of coastal lands which these countries are now facing. She identified that Governments must now respond to the intensity and the growing scale of the challenge. They need to adapt and intervene to prevent the worsening of the environment in small countries.

With regard to the emigration of skilled persons, Professor Thomas-Hope indicated that the poorest countries are losing proportionately more people. She quoted World Bank figures for 2011 which show that seven out of the ten top emigration countries in the world (of those who have been educated to a tertiary level) are in the Caribbean. Guyana tops the list with 89% and is providing highly trained people to the developed countries, Africa and to Caribbean neighbours. In addition, two of the non-Caribbean states in the top ten - Samoa and Tonga - are also in the Commonwealth.

The meeting of the Ramphal Commission in Jamaica was attended by six of its seven commissioners. These were: The Most Hon. P. J Patterson, Chairman; Ambassador Farooq Sobhan, former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh; Miss Jill Iliffe, Executive Director of the Commonwealth Nurses Federation; Mr Will Day, Chairman of the UK Sustainable Development Commission; Professor John Oucho, Director of the African Migration and Development Policy Centre in Nairobi, Kenya; and Professor Brenda Yeoh, of the National University of Singapore. Mr. George Vassiliou, former President of Cyprus, was unable to be present. Also in attendance and making presentations were representatives of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), The United Nations, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) as well as Ambassador June Spooner, St. Lucia's representative to the Caribbean Community and the Special Representative on Diaspora Affairs.

In his introductory remarks, Mr Patterson said that "topics before the meeting are matters of life and death for the Caribbean community and for small states in the Commonwealth". He added that Caribbean states have a compelling obligation to deal with environmental degradation which can reduce the option of people to stay in their countries of origin.

Commissioners considered how to build capacity in the management of environmentally induced migration, and how to reduce vulnerability to environmentally based hazards. They discussed the need for more cooperation between source and destination countries and examined how migration can be integrated into development policies. They noted the advantages of linkages with the diaspora and a wider partnership for development in states of origin.

The Commission's meeting was held with the support of The University of the West Indies Mona, and in conjunction with an academic symposium. The University organised two academic lectures attended by special guest Sir Shridath Ramphal, Chancellor Emeritus of The UWI. Six members of its faculty presented papers at the symposium which was opened by the Most Hon. PJ Patterson.

The Commission recorded its appreciation of the generous hospitality of the Prime Minister, Government and people of Jamaica and the sponsorship of the Jamaica National Building Society, and the Bank of Nova Scotia.

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