

**Caribbean (CARIFORUM) Statement on Initialling of the New  
OACPS-EU Partnership Agreement  
delivered by Senator the Honourable Kamina Johnson Smith  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade**

*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 their close collaboration with the OACPS, in particular, with its lead negotiators at the technical level, respective Chief Negotiators of all our regions, as well as with 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. 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 has heralded 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. We also recognise the new impulses that emanate from a two-tiered framework that allows for the framing of general policies at the All-OACPS/EU levels, and their specific articulation in the respective regional protocols.

The Caribbean 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. The Caribbean is also determined to collaborate with the EU on advancing the case for debt relief 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 of developmental challenges facing the Caribbean, our region will also 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. We call on the EU, as one of our main international development partners, to support our recovery efforts in order to demonstrate 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.