



Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS)
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COVID-19 in Prisons: CARICOM IMPACS and CARICOM States Taking Proactive Measures to Protect Prison Officers, Inmates And Visitors Against the Potential Spread of the COVID-19 in Prisons.

An outbreak of COVID-19 could have devastating results for prison officers, inmates, visitors and the surrounding community if decisive actions are not taken to prevent the introduction of the virus in correctional services and prisons.

In many countries in the Caribbean, correctional services, prisons and detention facilities are often overcrowded, and suffer from a lack of resources. While many CARICOM States in the region have taken some positive steps to protect the general population, the prison population remains particularly vulnerable for whom social distancing is a challenge, and for many, impossible.

In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, over 18 countries in the Caribbean, regional and international organisations and UWI participated in a special meeting via videoconference for Heads of Correctional Services and Prisons on Wednesday 25 March 2020 to prevent and control COVID-19 in correctional services, prisons and other detention areas.

The Meeting also provided an opportunity for Heads of Correctional Services and Prisons to be exposed to international best practices, procedures, protocols and support measures for both staff and prisoners; as well as social and administrative measures to reduce the psychological impact of the pandemic on employees, inmates, families and visitors.

For both inmates inside prisons and their loved ones outside, communication is a significant help to manage the psychological impact of the outbreak. As some prisons in the Region have stopped visitation, communication is being facilitated through controlled WhatsApp and FaceTime video calls.

Noting that prisoners have tested positive for COVID-19 in China, France, Iran, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, some Caribbean countries have already taken decisive steps to prevent COVID-19 in prisons, including early release of harmless prisoners, suspension of all visitations and the screening of staff for coronavirus symptoms before they enter prisons.

The Heads of Prisons were also presented with WHO published interim guidance on how to deal with COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention, entitled “*Preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention*”. The WHO guidance presents the latest evidence and management measures that should be considered in prison specificities. The WHO guidance noted that the global effort to tackle the spread of COVID-19 may fail without proper attention to infection control measures within prisons.

Proposals by prison heads to reduce COVID-19 in Prisons at the meeting included the early release of non-violent and sick and elderly inmates who pose absolutely no threat to society but only serve to increase the concentration of persons in prisons; increased screening of staff and prisoners; enhanced information sharing among prisoners and the development of national prison pandemic plans.

The meeting was coordinated by the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (CARICOM IMPACS) which partnered with the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) to support countries to take critical steps to prevent to prevent and address a potential disease outbreak.

Other participants at the meeting included the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), Organisation of Eastern Caribbean states (OECS), the Regional Security System (RSS) and the University of West Indies.

About CARICOM IMPACS

CARICOM IMPACS is the coordinating and implementation arm of the region’s multilateral crime and security management architecture, specifically designed to administer a collective response to the crime and security priorities of its Member States. Its members comprise 15 CARICOM Member States and five Associate States. IMPACS comprises the Headquarters which is located in Trinidad and Tobago and two sub-Agencies, the Joint Regional Communications Centre (JRCC) and the Regional

Intelligence Fusion Centre (RIFC). The Agency is responsible for the coordination of the Standing Committee of Correctional Services and Prisons in CARICOM.
