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COVID-19 in Haiti Prisons: CARICOM IMPACS and the United Kingdom Taking Urgent Measures to Control the Spread

PRESS RELEASE

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Port-au-Prince, 2 June 2020 – Haiti has recorded twenty-six (26) cases of COVID-19 in three (3) of its twenty two (22) prison facilities (as of 2 June 2020). Over ten thousand prisoners are currently housed inside Haiti’s penitentiary facilities which is almost eight times the holding capacity making it the most overcrowded in the Caribbean.

Responding to the request from Haiti Prison Authorities to support national COVID-19 measures to minimize and control the risk of the contagion inside their prisons, the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (CARICOM IMPACS) with the support of the United Kingdom (UK) has immediately provided urgent assistance of basic sanitation supplies and other COVID related supplies.

On Tuesday, 2 June 2020 an air shipment of the sanitation supplies arrived at the Toussaint Louverture International Airport, Port-au-Prince and was delivered to Louis Guerro Plancher, Chief of Staff, Department of Penitentiary Administration (DAP), Haiti; with the airlift capacity being provided by the French Air Force.

Mr. Plancher expressed profound gratitude to CARICOM IMPACS, the UK and the Commander of the French Forces in the Caribbean for their assistance in getting supplies to Haiti. He further said *“the materials will strengthening the capacity of the Department of Penitentiary Administration in Haiti to implement its plan to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, in a context where resources are lacking and cases of infection in prison are of concern to national authorities”*.

The supplies included infrared thermometers and cleaning products such as disinfectant, liquid soap, bleach, hand sanitizers and other COVID related supplies; which are in accordance with guidelines issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for the prevention and control of the pandemic in prisons.

The donation of these supplies will encourage and assist with the accelerated adoption of WHO guidelines for prisons and other places of detention, as well as help mitigate the spread of the pandemic, and reinforce security within Haiti prisons.

Over the past two weeks CARICOM IMPACS has successfully donated supplies to the correction and prison services in 10 CARICOM Member States - Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. This assistance package is part of an ongoing project funded by the UK government to support the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 in CARICOM Prisons. St. Lucia is expected to receive similar assistance on Friday 5 June 2020.

The Regional Security System (RSS) is a key partner in this collaborative initiative by providing airlift and logistical support for the distribution of supplies to some CARICOM Member States. The French Forces in the Caribbean also provided Airlift to the Bahamas and Belize.

Prisons are generally considered to be amplifiers in the spread of infectious diseases and pose a great challenge for authorities working to prevent and contain COVID-19. The WHO identifies people in prisons as more vulnerable to COVID-19 than the general population because of the confined conditions in which they live, and proximity with one another – conditions that facilitate transmission of diseases.

CARICOM IMPACS has been providing support in advancing COVID-19 related policies in regional prisons to prevent, mitigate and control an outbreak of the pandemic. Earlier this year, on 25 March 2020, at the CARICOM IMPACS Meeting of Heads of Corrections and Prison Services, proposals were advanced to reduce COVID-19 in Prisons included:

- Early release of non-violent 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; limiting unnecessary in-person visitation so as to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure in facilities;
- Enhanced information sharing among prisoners;
- Education and training for prison administrators and prison staff; and
- Development of national prison pandemic plans.

As part of the CARICOM coordinated response to COVID-19, CARICOM IMPACS is contributing to prevent and mitigate the spread of the pandemic in prisons, law enforcement and other security sectors in CARICOM Member States.



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 fifteen (15) CARICOM Member States and five (5) Associate Members. IMPACS comprises the Headquarters which is 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. Learn more at <https://www.caricomimpacs.org>