**Statement by Sir Ronald Sanders, Ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda, on behalf of CARICOM and other co-sponsors of the Resolution on The Equitable Distribution of COVID-19 Vaccines**

 **On 17 February 2021**

Madam President

I make this statement on behalf of all 14 CARICOM States, Honduras and other cosponsors of this Resolution.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the ongoing coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic poses an unprecedented challenge to public health on a global scale.

There are confirmed cases in more than 200 countries.

As of yesterday, there were 109 million cases globally and more than 2 million, four hundred thousand deaths world-wide.

Member states of this Organization accounted for more than 48 million infected cases and over one million, one hundred thousand deaths.

In other words, our countries have suffered 45% of the infected cases and 48% of the deaths.

That is almost half the global number of infected cases and nearly half the number of deaths in the world.

Madam President, those figures alone should give each of us – and all of us - every good reason to be gravely troubled about the damaging effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and well-being of our peoples.

In many – if not all – our countries, our hospitals are finding it enormously difficult to cope.

This is the primary reason why the 14 member states of CARICOM and 8 other sisters of in this Organization have co-sponsored the Resolution that is now before this Permanent Council, calling for a scaling up of the production of vaccines and a rapid and equitable acceleration of their distribution.

Over a million people in our countries have died.

They have died alone.

No family with them.

No loved one to whom to say goodbye.

They have had hurried funerals that have left families emotionally scarred.

Unless vaccines are produced and distributed, many more hundreds of thousands will suffer the same fate.

Madam President

Of the three main vaccine producing companies, one of them has sold most of its early doses only to rich countries where immunization campaigns are underway.

Poorer countries have been almost entirely shut out.

As of yesterday, a Study done by Duke University here in the US, shows that just 15% of the world’s population in wealthy countries have bought 60 percent of the all the available vaccine doses.

The inequity of the situation is clear for all to see.

Poorer countries are left waiting for adequate supplies of vaccines, and the pandemic is being prolonged with all its devastating effects.

The magnitude of the problem is echoing in other international organisations.

Today, the Security Council of the United Nations is also considering inequality and inequity in access to the anti-COVID-19 vaccine.

Nations all over the world are worried, mindful of the wisdom of Abraham Lincoln that no country can survive half-free and half slave.

Similarly, the world will not survive if 15% of the world holds for itself 60% of vaccines, and 85% of the people must struggle for an equitable share.

Madam President

The figures are instructive, regarding which countries have performed best in terms of delivering the first dose of any Covid-19 vaccination to a high percentage of their people.

Apart from the United Arab Emirates at 53.7% and Israel at 39.6%, the countries that have secured vaccines and been able to give their people at least one dose are:

Great Britain – 22.6%

The United States of America – almost 12%.

And the countries of the European Union - almost all of which have had sufficient vaccines to inoculate 4% of their people so far.

Amongst our member states, apart from the US, Chile ranks highest at 10.2%.

Thereafter, only three of our member states have managed to inoculate more than 1% of their people and even so, the inoculated numbers are paltry.

The three member states are: Peru at 3.5%, Canada at 3.25%, and Brazil at 2.41%.

None of our remaining 29 member states have had sufficient vaccines to inoculate more than 0.95% of their people.

The situation is deeply troubling, portending a calamity which threatens the entire world.

The contagion has fast extended to the economic sphere.

The looming global recession, which UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned could be of “record dimensions”, will pose a serious threat to developing countries at a time when investing in Sustainable Development Goals is most needed.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean had projected a decline in foreign direct investment to Latin America and the Caribbean last year -2020 - by about 50%.

With many economies across the region in a state of prolonged inactivity, the downward investment trend for 2021 is even more precipitous.

The year 2022 is unlikely to get any better unless every country gets the virus under control.

Developed countries will not escape these harmful economic consequences.

A research study, sponsored by the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research in Massachusetts, states that: “In monopolizing the supply of vaccines against COVID-19, wealthy nations are threatening more than a humanitarian catastrophe: The resulting economic devastation will hit affluent countries nearly as hard as those in the developing world”.

The study, also points out that even if wealthy countries are fully vaccinated by the middle of this year, and poor countries remain largely shut out, “the global economy would suffer losses exceeding $9 trillion, a sum greater than the annual output of Japan and Germany combined”.

We are truly all in this together.

The Director, of the Pan American Health Organization, Carissa Etienne, has made it clear that to get anywhere near seeing a suppression of the Coronavirus at least 70 to 80% of our populations have to be vaccinated.

That is about 450 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean and 360 million people in the US and Canada.

The combined numbers mean that we need to inoculate over 800 million people to reach the threshold of between 70% and 80% that gives us a level of what is called “herd immunity”.

This is a matter that demands an urgent response from all countries, acting in concert, and particularly from the richest nations.

We are bringing this matter to the Permanent Council of the OAS because it is not only a public health emergency; it is a political problem with several urgent dimensions, including:

Global economic decline

Massive unemployment

Huge expansion in poverty

Inability to repay existing debt

Degradation of human rights in all countries

Threats to the sustainability of democracy in many countries

A large swell in refugees.

Millions more infected persons

Collapse of health systems and

Millions more deaths.

Madam President,

There are other attendant problems.

Our colleague the distinguished Ambassador of Honduras has pointed out that the Countries of Central America and the Caribbean - the majority of countries assembled here – suffer year after year from natural disasters.

Many of these countries were still recovering from these disasters when the COVID-19 pandemic descended upon them like the biblical swarm of locusts.

They struggled through 2020 with significantly decreased national revenues amid extraordinary expenses to manage the health and economic effects of the pandemic.

They are stretched to the absolute limit.

The importance of inoculating a large number of our people before the Hurricane Season starts in five months’ time must be emphasized.

In bringing this Resolution to the Permanent Council, the CARICOM member states, and Honduras consulted widely.

We took account of a great number of suggestions, conceding many of our positions, in crafting what is now before us.

The Resolution is not perfect.

No resolution ever satisfies all the delegations all the time.

Indeed, we in CARICOM and Honduras would have liked it to be stronger in many aspects.

But, we did not want to discard the good, because we could not attain the perfect.

We believe the Resolution before us will serve all our countries well in the objectives it is trying to achieve.

We must recall that 29 of our 34 states have only been able to inoculate a tiny number of their people - less than 1%.

I recall your own words, Madam President, spoken on a similar occasion – there is a danger of inequity even in hope.

All of us must firmly act against that danger.

In commending this Resolution to the Council, I hope Madam President that we will not have to vote on it, and that in a spirit of cooperation and in our mutual interest, we will adopt it by acclamation.

Thank you.