



Jamaica's Country Statement RP21

November 1-4, 2021

It is an honour for Jamaica to serve as host of the 7th Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas and the Caribbean a first for the Caribbean hosting this forum and the first digital forum of this nature brought about by the global pandemic COVID-19.

The increasing frequency and intensity with which disasters are being experienced on a global scale especially among Small Island Developing States (SIDS), such as the Caribbean and for us here in Jamaica where one event can deal catastrophic blows to our economy, this has highlight the need to look deeper at measures required to enhance Disaster Risk Management and Disaster Risk Reduction. Disasters in the Caribbean often caused millions of dollars in losses to infrastructure, the environment, retards economic gains, displaced populations and take lives. These impacts has raised our awareness on the great need to continue strengthen national and regional capacities to mitigate, prepare for, respond to and manage disaster events.

In the last 20 years Jamaica has been the most impacted of all the countries of the Caribbean with disaster events amounting to annual losses in excess of 127 billion Jamaican dollars 1.3 percent of GDP.

More so these events have threatened lives, caused major displacement, and have resulted in psycho-social issues for our population especially among the most vulnerable such as the aged, persons with disabilities and children.

Because of Jamaica's exposure to various hazards and the fact that even countries with very strong disaster risk management programs and frameworks are still be highly exposed to the economic and fiscal shocks caused by major disasters. The Government has placed Disaster Risk Finance (DRF) as a corner stone of the country's disaster management agenda and has put in place measures aimed at addressing the fiscal impacts and economic losses caused by natural hazards thus increasing our financial resilience to and ensuring that our populations are financially protected in the event of a disaster. The country have worked closely with the World Bank and the IADB to map out a series of risk financing instruments to place the country on various pillars of financial protection should we be impacted by a major disaster. The Contingent Credit Facility for Natural Disaster Emergencies (CCF) and the World Bank catastrophe bond that will provide the Government of Jamaica with financial protection of up to US\$185 million against losses from storms for three Atlantic hurricane seasons ending in 2023 also Jamaica continue to be a part of Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF) which offers earthquake, tropical cyclone and excess rainfall insurance policies. We also have a national contingency fund and a national disaster fund.

In looking at the current crisis facing Jamaica, the global pandemic COVID-19 this has further weakened the fragile socio-economic fabric of the Caribbean and by extension Jamaica.

Since our first case since March 10, 2020 the pandemic has had major impacts on the Jamaican economy and our society at large. The government has introduced a number of measures to respond to contain the spread of the virus. These included the declaration for the first time under Disaster Risk Management Act of 2015 the country as a disaster area; the imposed measures lead to the closure of all school to face to face teacher pupil interaction, closure of air and seaports to incoming passenger; imposition of travel restrictions on selected countries; and the imposition of a Work From Home mandate for all non-essential workers in both the public and private sectors. These emergency measures were enhanced by a media communication campaign aimed at encouraging the public to adhere to COVID-19 protocols and also with a view to foster positive change within the society around sanitation.

In addition to the enforcement measures, the Administration instituted a number of social protection and stabilization measures aimed at reducing negative impact of the pandemic on the economy and the society. These included a \$31.0 billion stimulus package consisting of approximately \$15.0 billion in tax cuts and spending stimulus of \$16.0 billion. In addition, health expenditures of \$6.0 billion and public body support of \$3.0 billion make for a total fiscal intervention of approximately \$40.0 billion.

The COVID-19 impact has resulted in higher levels of indebtedness, unemployment and psychological stress, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations.

The Government of Jamaica remains resolute in its efforts to protect the population. By and large, Jamaica has managed to control and contain the situation through the risk-based approach to measures that were adapted and the protocols that were implemented.

We still continue to face various issues such as, monitoring and enforcement of protocols and compliance from the general population, Acquisition of Vaccines, Mitigating rumors concerning vaccines and vaccination hesitancy, Sustaining Social Protection Services to the most vulnerable and most impacted, Impact on funding of government projects and programmes needed diversion of funding to COVID-19 Response activities, Significant burden on health resources with marked challenges of sustaining routine services alongside the COVID-19 response and increase workload on health workers, Significant burden on security forces to enforce measures under the orders and work in relation to the daily curfew, and how to continue to engage one of our most vulnerable group when it comes to disasters (our children) many who have gone unengaged since the COVID outbreak given lack of devices and limitation to interconnectivity.

Despite the many challenges and difficulties responding to the pandemic; there are some lessons and positives that have emerged. These include, Increased public private partnerships, Increased fiscal discipline and overall management, Innovative and creative use of technologies including better emergency response, collaboration and cooperation, Increase in the use of technology, recognition of the importance of planning and resourcing for emergencies beyond natural hazards, as well as, a greater appreciation for the impact of climate change considering the potential for multiple and prolonged hazard impacts.

The pandemic has accentuated the challenges confronted by the region and Jamaica as a country and this experience has called for new initiatives to tackle long-standing issues.

Given these myriad of issues facing us, Jamaica is even more now than before committed to reducing the impact of disasters on our country and our people we continue to see Disaster Risk Reduction measures and Climate Change Adaptation initiatives as the catalyst to achieving this end. We see these two disciplines not only as a means of preventing or reducing negative impacts disasters on our people and the, but as critical and significant mechanism to sustainable economy growth and development.

The country always have and always will places high priority on Disaster Risk Reduction efforts at all levels and across all sector and will continue the fulfilment of our mandate to lead, promote and foster a change in culture and attitude towards disaster risk reduction which will ultimately lead to extensive resilience building and sustainable economic growth and development.

So as we engage in meaningful discussion over the four days, it is our hope that at the end of these deliberations, there will be common ground a common agreement about the way forward. It is also hoped that as the work continue the word to build disaster resilient countries, and more robust and anti-fragile economies we can develop through mutual understanding a proper support mechanism for all states.

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Jamaica