



**Co-operative Republic of Guyana**  
**Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**

254 South Road & Shiv Chanderpaul Drive, Georgetown, Guyana

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Hugh Hilton Todd, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, at the Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Group of 77 and China**

**Thematic Debate**

**"Global response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the obstacles it poses to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and achievement of the SDGs"**

**12 November 2020**

His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana  
Honorable Ministers  
Distinguished Participants

1. We have come to the point in the agenda where we must take a 'deep-dive' in reviewing the lessons learnt so far in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to chart a way for the future. But the future, by its very definition, must be relative. Flexibility and change will define policy making and the scope of action needed for development.
2. According to the World Health Organization, confirmed cases of COVID-19 now exceed 44.8 million worldwide, with over 1 million deaths as of October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The human toll of death and destruction has been staggering. We commend the speed of global collaboration in the search for vaccines, particularly through the ACT-Accelerator initiative of GAVI – The Vaccine Alliance and the WHO, with the hope that it will benefit all countries.

**Co-operative Republic of Guyana**  
**Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**

254 South Road & Shiv Chanderpaul Drive, Georgetown, Guyana

3. We also note the good news of support for the building up of manufacturing capabilities, the maintenance of global supply chains, and plans for the distribution of up to 2 billion doses of vaccine by the end of 2021, once initial testing is completed - through the COVAX Facility.
  
4. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of our public health systems, putting immense strain on healthcare provision, and widening socio-economic divides. In short order, our development priorities shifted to the immediate task of saving lives and livelihoods. Rapid building up of capacity for the effective distribution of social services became imperative, in the face of deepening inequalities, increased gender-based violence and greater vulnerability among children, youth and marginalized households. But we cannot relent in our primary aim to eradicate poverty and inequality.
  
5. UNDESA estimates that over 34 million people globally will be pushed into extreme poverty this year alone. Some consider this an optimistic forecast, with the World Bank projecting that between 71 million and 100 million people will be pushed into extreme poverty this year. One thing is certain, that the gains of development of the past decades, and the progress made in the fight against extreme poverty have been eroded.
  
6. The social cost of the COVID-19 pandemic is unfathomable. Children in poor households suffer disproportionately from the closure of schools, with limited or often no access to digital learning facilities and often missing out on school feeding initiatives. The World Bank estimates that school closures could cause over 7 million students to discontinue their education, drastically increasing their chances of living in poverty. An additional 10 million children globally could face acute malnutrition, with a doubling of the number of people facing acute food insecurity in 2020 relative to 2019.

**Co-operative Republic of Guyana**  
**Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**

254 South Road & Shiv Chanderpaul Drive, Georgetown, Guyana

7. Globally, 243 million women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months. The number is likely to increase as security, health, and money worries heighten tensions and strains are accentuated by cramped and confined living conditions.

Excellencies,

8. Our policy response has evolved, firstly, around the need to save lives and provide critical household support; secondly, in maintaining financial stability, and; thirdly, in providing liquidity and other support to business, particularly small and medium enterprises.
9. Estimates of global GDP contraction in 2020 range from 3.2 percent to 5.2 per cent - potentially the largest contraction in economic activity since the Great Depression. For regions like my own, this contraction is estimated to be 8.1%, with our CARICOM Small Island Developing States bearing the brunt of this, given the heavy reliance on tourism and services.
10. In the informal sector, including the gig economy, up to 1.6 billion people are estimated to be at risk of losing their livelihoods, according to the ILO. Many lack access to any form of social protection and youth are more likely to be in informal employment and in unemployment than adults. Again, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced a 20 percent contraction in employment in the second quarter of 2020 alone.

Distinguished colleagues,

11. Not only are our Governments forced to consider shifts in policy priorities, but there are clear signs of even greater shifts by our development partners. An estimated ten trillion dollars were spent by G20 developed economies in COVID-19 stimulus packages, in the

**Co-operative Republic of Guyana**  
**Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**

254 South Road & Shiv Chanderpaul Drive, Georgetown, Guyana

first few months of the pandemic. McKinsey and Company reports that Japan has spent 117.1 trillion Yen, equivalent to 21.0 percent of its gross domestic product. And Germany reportedly spent 33 percent of its gross domestic product on COVID-19 rescue programmes, compared to 5.5 percent for Brazil, 10 percent for India and 8.6 percent for South Africa. At issue is, of course, the limited policy space available to G-77 countries.

12. The upshot of this is that the liquidity to weather this storm is severely lacking in many of our countries. With limited scope for raising revenue, coupled with contracting economic activity, we have found ourselves mainly reliant on access to financial flows from multilateral financial institutions. Sadly, this access is severely restricted for the majority of our members due to outmoded systems of classification.
  
13. Official development assistance – ODA – could be the most assured form of financial support in our response to the pandemic and in our efforts to rebuild economic and social structures. We know that ODA volumes declined in 2018 and 2019, and the OECD has recognized that the need for concessional development finance like ODA is unparalleled in 2020, in response to COVID-19. Now more than ever, we call on our developed partners to honor the commitment to increase ODA flows as a percent of gross national income.
  
14. Trade as an engine of growth is especially tenuous, with UNCTAD estimating that COVID-19 could trigger as much as fifty billion dollars in export losses across global value chains.
  
15. Many of our countries are heavily reliant on remittance flows, which are expected to decline by 20 percent for this year. UNCTAD also projects a decline in foreign direct investment of between forty and fifty percent in the 2020-2021 period.

Distinguished colleagues,

**Co-operative Republic of Guyana**  
**Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**

254 South Road & Shiv Chanderpaul Drive, Georgetown, Guyana

16. These factors put together, make a compelling case for greater international solidarity and cooperation. We must refocus our attention on implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in this Decade of Action and Delivery of sustainable development. Collectively, we must redouble our efforts to eradicate poverty and inequality, deal with the impacts and threat of climate change and work towards achieving the seventeen interconnected and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals.

17. The frameworks exist. But accelerated implementation will require the requisite financing, and, as always, the political will, to give meaningful effect to our aspirations.

I thank you.