

Ninth UK-Caribbean Ministerial Forum “Building a Stronger Partnership for Sustainable Growth and Development”

Communiqué

1. The Ninth UK Caribbean Ministerial Forum was held in Freeport, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas, on 29-30 April 2016. The Governments of the United Kingdom and the Caribbean reaffirmed their commitment to the Forum as an important vehicle for co-operation, reflecting the special relationship that exists between the United Kingdom, the Caribbean states and the British Overseas Territories.
2. Since the Eighth UK Caribbean Ministerial Forum held in London on 16-17 June 2014, the UK and the Caribbean have made significant progress in the priority areas identified, with closer co-operation on Energy, Education, and Security. The UK also reaffirmed its commitment to working with the Caribbean during Prime Minister David Cameron’s visit to the region in September 2015, during which he pledged greater support for and engagement with the Caribbean.
3. We the Ministers and Representatives of the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Caribbean agree to the following joint communiqué.

Prosperity and Sustainable Development

4. The UK and the Caribbean commit:
 - To promote trade and investment between the UK and the Caribbean, exploiting the favourable terms for market access to Europe provided for by the Economic Partnership Agreement in both goods and services; recognising in particular that trade in services is a fundamental pillar for economic growth in both the Caribbean and the UK.
 - To work towards eliminating the barriers to trade and improving the business environment; promoting policies to reduce bureaucracy, enforce better regulation, encourage entrepreneurship and attract investment.
 - To encourage linkages between the Caribbean and UK business organisations such as Chambers of Commerce, trade associations and international business organisations such as the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, and the Caribbean Business Council.
 - To exchange best practices, expertise and experiences, given that human resource development is critical to attracting investment and to building capacity. We will work together to source additional technical assistance

from international institutions such as the United Nations, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Organization of American States, the Caribbean Development Bank, the World Bank, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Inter-American Development Bank, the University of the West Indies, and other relevant institutions.

5. The Caribbean countries reemphasised the need to increase awareness of the inherent vulnerabilities of small-island developing states to exogenous economic and financial shocks, and that their efforts to secure special consideration in mobilising concessional financing are rendered difficult by the challenges of “graduation” and “differentiation” resulting from their classification as Middle Income Countries (MICS). We discussed the high level of indebtedness of some Caribbean countries, including the efforts they are making on debt-restructuring, and the challenges faced in finding the necessary resources to develop resilient infrastructure, to engage in reconstruction after natural disasters, and to develop resilient infrastructure.
6. The UK reaffirmed its continued commitment to the sustainable development of the Caribbean region, particularly in the areas of economic growth and job creation, tackling crime and corruption, climate change and natural disasters.
7. As part of this commitment, the UK’s development support to Caribbean countries will increase substantially over the next four years. Over £360m in grant-finance will be allocated to the Caribbean in bilateral programme support, including a £300 million infrastructure programme announced in 2015 for specific countries. The UK will also continue to provide grant support to the Special Development Fund of the Caribbean Development Bank and will continue to work in partnership with the Caribbean countries to maximise the impact of this, and other spending in the region.
8. The UK and the Caribbean Countries commit to continue to cooperate on international financial rules and global standards on tax transparency, and reiterated the need for opportunities to increase the level of Caribbean participation in the rule-making processes which affect their economies. Noting the importance of this sector to the development of the Caribbean, the UK agreed to work with the EU, G20 and OECD to facilitate effective dialogue between the established and emerging international financial centres.
9. The Caribbean Countries expressed their deep concern over the threat posed to the financial stability of Member States by de-risking by the global banks which have resulted in the withdrawal, restricted access to, or higher costs of correspondent banking services to the Caribbean banking sector. The indiscriminate termination of correspondent banking relations is a worrying development that now threatens the region’s economic stability and capacity to remain properly integrated into the global financial, trade and economic

systems. Given the important role that the financial sector plays in the growth and development of a country's economy, these actions have negative implications for economies in the region, including in the areas of remittances, payment of pensions, and financing of trade facilitation. The Caribbean therefore called on the UK to continue to work with international partners to address this global phenomenon, and to encourage banks which provide correspondent banking services, and regulatory authorities, to take into account the efforts being made by Caribbean countries and financial institutions to implement international regulations and to mitigate risks.

10. Recognising the abundance of natural energy resources available in the Caribbean, the relative lack of expertise, the high cost of exploration and the need to significantly reduce the region's dependence on fossil fuel and build energy independence in the long term; we agreed to deepen our collaboration to accelerate the development of renewable and sustainable energy solutions.
11. The UK reaffirmed its commitment to working with its partners in the Caribbean to develop a long term strategy to secure energy supplies from a mix of sources and to pursue technical exchanges between both sides as a matter of urgency, and to encourage public, private and academic partnerships between the UK and the Caribbean to develop alternative energy sources and solutions.
12. We recognised the importance of education and its benefits for productivity, competitiveness and development and reiterated our commitment to provide quality education as framed by SDG4 of the 2030 Agenda, including through strengthening technical and vocational offerings and instructor training for higher level certification.
13. We acknowledged the need to empower youth as agents of change through meaningful participation in national decision making, youth led initiatives and the expansion of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities to reduce unemployment rates among young people in the Caribbean and the United Kingdom.
14. We agreed to continue to promote youth-led approaches and to work in partnership with regional and national youth organisations to fulfil this commitment. The UK agreed with Caribbean countries that the high rate of youth unemployment in the region is a concern. The UK is currently working with national training agencies in 6 Caribbean countries (Antigua, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St Lucia and St Vincent) to promote skills development for disadvantaged youth. The UK is also developing a new £10m skills programme that will be focused on specific countries in the Caribbean and is expected to be implemented from 2017 onwards.

15. We recognised the human and economic losses caused by infectious diseases and the need to provide access to primary health care and to work with our international partners to support health sector development, preparedness, and response to combat disease and threats to global health.
16. To achieve the goal of universal access to healthcare in accordance with 2030 Agenda and SDG 3, we committed to collaborate to build capacity and strengthen health delivery, including by drawing on UK expertise on awareness, research data collection and education, in order to combat HIV/AIDS and mosquito borne diseases such as Malaria, Zika, Chikungunya, Dengue as well as other Communicable and Non-communicable Diseases. In the first instance the UK will create a bespoke team of public health experts to work with the Caribbean to help them tackle the challenge posed by Zika.
17. Recognising that Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) is a significant global threat, the UK and Caribbean Countries commit to support pro-actively the achievement of an ambitious outcome in the UN General Assembly in 2016 that builds on implementation of the Global Action Plan on AMR agreed at the WHO in 2015.
18. The UK confirmed that through a partnership with the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), it will invest £38M in improvements in disaster safety and environmental efficiency for around 7-10% of health facilities in 7 Caribbean countries (Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Lucia and St Vincent).
19. Recognising the importance of maritime resources to the development of the Caribbean as Small Island Developing States, the UK and the Caribbean will encourage private, public and academic partnerships focussing on the Blue Economy, Ocean Governance and Management in the region, including through Project Neptune, the UK's £5.6m programme of support to Commonwealth Small Island Developing States. We recognised the economic, environmental and public health challenges the Caribbean faces as a result of the recent influx of sargassum seaweed; the UK will continue to support activity on how to harness the economic opportunities that sargassum presents.
20. We discussed the important role that the United Kingdom can continue to play in advocating in support of the interests and concerns of the Caribbean in international fora where the Caribbean is not represented, such as the G7, G20, the international financial institutions, and the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on issues such as vulnerability, high-indebtedness, and the development challenges associated with the classification of several CARICOM countries as Middle Income Countries.

Global Challenges

21. The UK and Caribbean Countries committed to hold a regular exchange of views on issues of mutual interest in multilateral and international fora. Such exchanges will cover issues of bilateral and global importance including, among other topics, the vulnerability of small island states, high-indebtedness, the existential threat of climate change and the categorisation of the majority of CARICOM states as middle-income countries. We will work with the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNDP and ECLAC on the issue of categorisation.
22. We committed to support the UNSG's Plan of Action on Preventing Violence and Extremism (PVE), recognising the need to drive implementation through national action plans and through a reformed UN structure which ensures PVE is embedded across all the UN pillars – human rights, peace and security, and development.
23. Recognising that corruption is a barrier to trade, discourages investment and creates a culture of impunity as well as perpetuating inequality. We agreed that as a transnational issue it is incumbent on all governments to expose, punish and prevent corruption and support those who have suffered as a result. The UK stands ready to support the Caribbean through the sharing of best practice and capacity building.
24. We remain concerned that border and territorial disputes can be contentious and unnecessary barriers to economic and social development; that they frustrate trade, environmental protection, security, and law enforcement; and have the potential to lead to armed conflict. We therefore support the efforts of Belize and Guatemala under the auspices of the Organization of American States to promote confidence and urge the parties to take the necessary measures to finding a lasting solution to Guatemala's claims against Belize at the International Court of Justice in accordance with their Special Agreement of 2008. We noted that neighbours have a duty to refrain from the threat or use of force, and that the Confidence Building Measures between Belize and Guatemala of 2005 establishes a verification process to address border incidents that must be observed. We are concerned by the ongoing tensions along the Sarstoon River which defines the boundary between Belize and Guatemala and called on both parties to establish confidence building measures in that area to foster peace and security.
25. Ministers took note of the recent developments with respect to the controversy between Guyana and Venezuela which arose from Venezuela's contention that the 1899 Arbitral Award, which definitively settled the land boundary between Guyana and Venezuela, is null and void.

26. Ministers expressed their full support for the role of the United Nations Secretary General and his efforts, in keeping with the provisions of the Geneva Agreement, to bring the controversy to a definitive and judicious conclusion.
27. Ministers reaffirmed their unequivocal support for the maintenance and preservation of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
28. We committed to support the principle and the right to self-determination for all peoples, recognising the historical importance of self-determination in the political development of the Caribbean, and its core status as an internationally agreed principle under the United Nations Charter.
29. We welcomed the Paris Agreement on climate change, particularly the confirmation that all countries would act to keep the global average temperature increase well below 2°C, and pursue efforts to keep it below 1.5°C. This is of great importance to Small Island States like the Caribbean. It will be necessary for all UNFCCC Parties to agree strong transparency and accountability rules and to increase ambition through the 5-yearly review process until the long-term goal is reached.
30. The UK reaffirmed that it would work in partnership with Caribbean countries to build resilience to the effects of climate change and transition to a low carbon economy. This includes raising awareness and supporting education and research mechanisms that would provide the tools for preparation, relief, and security to combat climate change and its effects. In combination, these would help deliver sustainable development and growth for the UK and the Caribbean.
31. In accordance with International law, we acknowledge the obligation to respect the rights of all individuals in our territories and subject to our jurisdictions of any kind and recognize our obligation without discrimination of any kind. We commit to work toward the elimination of all forms of discrimination.
32. We recognise that gender equality is critical to national development and agree to mainstream gender throughout all national development plans and strategies as well as to ensure equality of access for all.

Crime, Security and the Rule of Law

33. Serious and organised crime continue to threaten UK and Caribbean security, increase the level of violence, loss of life and deprivation, undermining economic growth and prosperity, and create barriers to new investments. The UK and the Caribbean will continue to enhance their partnership and collaboration in the fight against organised crime.

34. We recognised that we must work together to strengthen implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects in order to restrict the illicit trade and availability of such weapons which contribute to the increasing level of armed violence and the transshipment of drugs, and undermines stability, security and development.
35. As part of our ongoing efforts to encourage greater transparency and build further trust in the global financial sector, we agreed to work together to curtail tax non-compliance through the concealing of assets and identities by individuals. We recognised that greater credibility and transparency in the international financial system is better achieved through collaboration.
36. We also agreed the need to combat the challenges associated with tax evasion and illicit finance; to deny and deprive criminals of the proceeds of crime through common asset recovery legislation, investigations and prosecutions; and to consult regularly and exchange information on common security matters including criminal deportation.
37. We committed to working together to develop criminal justice systems fit for 21st century challenges and which address the threats posed by organised crime, violence and extremism.
38. The UK and the Caribbean committed to collaborating on the expansion of the use of technology in the criminal justice system.
39. We strongly condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including threats to cyber security, and acknowledged the increasing number of terrorist attacks which threaten international peace and security. We committed to work together within the International Community to ensure that our responses in the fight against terrorism are consistent with international law and conventions, including effective implementation of UN sanctions.
40. The two sides agreed to establish a mechanism to ensure follow-up of the decisions adopted and concerns raised during the Forum.