

# *Caribbean governments join forces against COVID-19*

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The Health and Foreign Ministers of the Association of Caribbean States, the ACS, held their first extraordinary meeting of the regional bloc on COVID-19 earlier this week, during which the delegations proposed joint actions to confront the pandemic.

More than 33 countries, territories, and regional organizations participated in the meeting that has been developed under the videoconference method.

The gathering discussing the elements of an ACS strategy to confront the virus in the Caribbean, including the identification of key external partners and the mobilization of resource strategies.

In the video-conference, ACS Secretary General June Soomer claimed that a regional response to COVID-19 must include the following strategies for testing, care, communication, supply coordination, food security, immigration and customs, education, mapping, remote working systems, and the psychological impact of the virus and quarantine.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said that reality requires putting the will to act and solidarity before inaction and selfishness. "Humanity demands an effective solution. Together we can achieve it," he added.

"The pandemic," Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez stated, "does not respect borders or ideologies, and represents a challenge not only for the present, but for the future due to the serious consequences for the countries' social and economic development."

The senior Cuban diplomat also proposed that a virtual technical workshop be organized in the coming days for health specialists to share experiences and exchange information that contributes to confronting COVID 19.

The Cuban proposal includes inviting other nations such as the United States and Canada to participate, in order to expand coordination and exchange.

Rodríguez reiterated Cuba's willingness to put its experiences, the expertise of its highly skilled health professionals, and medicines at the service of all its Caribbean neighbors.

Cuban medical contingents are already offering their services in several countries such as Jamaica, Grenada, Suriname, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Belize and even in Italy, fighting COVID-19, upon those governments' request. On Thursday, March 26, four additional contingents of Cuba's Henry Reeve brigade of doctors specializing in serious epidemics and disaster situations departed for the Commonwealth of Dominica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia and Antigua and Barbuda to face off with the health crisis presented by the pandemic.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza, called for maximum coordination throughout the region to be able to face this pandemic that, quote, "threatens all our peoples alike."

Minister Arreaza stressed the importance of external alliances, stating that Venezuela, despite the illegal U.S. sanctions, has managed to maintain essential partnerships with the United Nations system, especially with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and allied countries such as China, Russia, and Cuba.

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