Statement by the Hon. Mia Amor Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados, on the Occasion of the Signing of the Host Country Agreement Regarding Arrangements for the Fifteenth Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Bridgetown, August 5th, 2020

Your Excellency, Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development;

Senator Dr the Hon. Jerome Walcott, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados;

The Hon. Sandra Husbands, Minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade;

Mr Didier Trebucq, United Nations Resident Coordinator for Barbados and the OECS;

Ambassador Chad Blackman, Permanent Representative of Barbados to the United Nations in Geneva;

Ambassadors and Representatives of UNCTAD member states;

Members of the National Organising Committee for UNCTAD 15 and their counterparts in the UNCTAD Secretariat;

Representatives of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am delighted to be able to join with you, Secretary-General Kituyi -in Nairobi- together with officials and member states of UNCTAD and representatives of the media, who are all participating, from multiple jurisdictions, in this historic event: the signing of the Host Country Agreement between the UNCTAD Secretariat and the Government of Barbados on arrangements for the 15th Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

I use the word historic deliberately and, I believe, with some justification.

- This is the first time that my Government has put its signature on an agreement with another international or bilateral party without actually having the signatories together in the same room in the same country! I think it is also a first for the UNCTAD Secretariat. We all know the circumstances that have prompted this
creative solution, which may well prove not only to be precedent setting, but a foretaste of the ‘new norm’.

- By signing this Agreement, Barbados confirms its intent to become the first Caribbean country and the first Small Island Developing State ever to host a session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. At no time in recent memory have those two words, trade and development, seemed more significant.

- It is also undoubtedly a first for us to attempt to plan and carry out a major international conference in the midst of such unprecedented global turbulence and uncertainty.

We in the Caribbean have, regrettably, become all too accustomed to dealing with the onslaught of hurricanes, which track annually through our island chain with devastating economic and social consequences. Yet never in history has one hurricane decimated all of our countries all at once in the way that a vicious virus called COVID-19 has managed to do to the community of nations.

Caribbean states have done well to manage and contain the spread of COVID-19 within our jurisdictions, but our tourism-dependent, open economies have had little defence against the global economic contagion that has followed.

As you know, COVID-19 has already impacted the convening of UNCTAD 15, which we have been forced to reschedule from its original dates in October this year. It proved impossible to proceed as normal given the trajectory of the global pandemic, the closure of borders and the disruption of global air travel, as well as the suspension of physical meetings of the preparatory negotiating bodies in Geneva.

I cannot deny that the current environment continues to challenge us. Yet it is a challenge the Government of Barbados and the UNCTAD Secretariat are prepared to accept. We remain positive that by next year the determined efforts of world scientists and the prudent precautionary measures we are putting in place will help to make the convening of UNCTAD 15 a reality.

After careful consideration and consultation with Secretary-General Kituyi and the UNCTAD membership, I am pleased therefore to confirm that the 15th Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD 15) will now be held in Barbados from April 25th to April 30th, 2021. Pre-Conference events including six
Forums on Youth, Civil Society, Gender and Development, Global Commodities, the Creative Industries and Trade Digitisation are planned for April 23rd and 24th.

The Government of Barbados is committed to delivering a Conference that allows for the universal participation of UNCTAD’s 195 member states while fully protecting the health and safety of both the visiting delegates and the local population of Barbados. We aim to provide a platform for consequential deliberation and action by Ministers and for serious engagement with civil society, youth and the private sector. Above all, we are determined to make UNCTAD 15 an inclusive and unforgettable event that offers significant opportunities for the creativity and entrepreneurship of the people of Barbados.

On February 5th this year, UNCTAD member states reached agreement on the theme for UNCTAD 15: From Inequality and Vulnerability to Prosperity for All. In retrospect, our choice could not have been more relevant or timely.

The global pandemic has reminded us how vulnerable and exposed we are to shocks that threaten our very existence, let alone our development. Equally, the challenges to multilateralism continue to be exacerbated at a time when international cooperation is needed more than ever if our nations are to attain their strategic objectives and sustainable development goals.

During the past few months we have also witnessed worldwide protests, as ordinary people of all ages, races and backgrounds have taken to the streets to call for greater equality and social justice. This global phenomenon has put leaders on notice that the disadvantaged and vulnerable are no longer prepared to be marginalised and forgotten, and that citizens everywhere are standing beside them in the call for radical change. The remarkable convergence that we are witnessing demands from the international community an equally determined response. I firmly believe that our UNCTAD 15 theme provides us with a real opportunity finally to address the systemic causes of the vast and growing inequalities and inherent vulnerabilities that exist within and between our States. New thinking and bold action are urgently required if we hope to succeed in our efforts to end poverty and provide equal opportunities for all.

In summary, the COVID-19 global emergency and its extreme repercussions have exposed the need for a fundamental rethinking of many of the assumptions that previously underpinned the international economic order. In a sudden and unexpected way, the crisis has provided the UNCTAD membership with a unique opportunity to be at the forefront of the new thinking and radical policy corrections that the situation now requires. You and I, Secretary-General, share the conviction that UNCTAD 15 must be a transformational Conference with transformational outcomes. Decisive leadership by our
Governments is urgently needed, if we are seriously committed to empowering our multilateral institutions to respond to the acute and persistent development challenges of the twenty-first century.

As host of the Conference, the Barbados Government anticipates that Ministers will debate and provide leadership on a range of issues. These include:

- the impact of COVID-19 on Trade and Development;
- the future of the multilateral trading system;
- the nexus between health and trade in policy formulation;
- measuring vulnerability and managing debt;
- development of MSMEs;
- structural transformation of developing countries;
- the growth of the digital economy;
- the impact of climate change on trade and development;
- trade facilitation and transportation; and
- the importance of regional integration in building resilient value and supply chains to strengthen our business continuity systems and food security.

Secretary-General, I also eagerly await your report to the Conference, which I understand will serve as a main input into the preparation of the outcome document. I am sure that it will provide us with a serious, solution-oriented analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on various aspects of the global economy as well as the trade and development imperatives of developing countries. I anticipate that the position papers and working documents of the various groups that inform the negotiations of the Preparatory Committee will similarly reflect the dramatically changed global reality.

Secretary-General, Ladies and Gentlemen, there is another input that the Government of Barbados offered to this process in the form of a Global Commission on Trade and Development Options 2020. Professor the Rt. Hon Owen Arthur, a former Prime Minister of Barbados and an eminent regional and international statesman, was appointed as Chairman of the Commission and was enthusiastically working with his fellow Commissioners to have their final conclusions and recommendations available, in the near future, as an independent contribution to the preparatory process for UNCTAD 15. Professor Arthur’s untimely death, on July 27th, has deprived Barbados and the Caribbean of an exceptional nation-builder and regional integrationist. It has also deprived the international community of one of its most ardent advocates for the concerns of small states. As a mark of respect for the late Prime Minister Arthur we postponed this signing ceremony until today. As a tribute to his memory we intend to complete and build upon
the work of the Commission, and to find a fitting way to honour his legacy during UNCTAD 15.

In closing, I would like to express my gratitude to the technical teams from Barbados and the UNCTAD Secretariat who are working tirelessly to deliver this Conference in the safest and most secure environment possible.

Secretary-General, Ladies and Gentlemen, in signing this Agreement Barbados reiterates its strong commitment to multilateralism and to the United Nations System as an indispensable platform to support the development of all states, particularly those of us that have specific and unique challenges. I give you my Government’s commitment that we will spare no effort to ensure that UNCTAD 15, both in its deliberations and in its policy conclusions, takes full advantage of this transformational moment in global affairs.

I thank you.