



**Announcement on the Virtual Hosting of the  
15<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial United Nations Conference on  
Trade and Development**

**Remarks by  
The Hon. Mia Amor Mottley, Q. C., M. P.  
Prime Minister of Barbados**

**Friday March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Good morning Barbados, Good afternoon Geneva. I want to thank all of the representatives of the member states, the Secretariat, the media, and the Organising Teams for UNCTAD 15 for logging in to be with us today.

I'd like to also take this opportunity to congratulate you, Madame Durant on your recent appointment as Acting Secretary General of UNCTAD. I have worked with you in the past as we prepared, and I look forward to working with you as we come to this point to be able to prepare for October.

Since you assume office at a pivotal moment both for UNCTAD as an Organisation and for the preparation of the 15<sup>th</sup> Session of the Conference, I know that you have been thrown in at the deep end, but I can assure you that we will work well together in order to ensure that we achieve the objectives in October.

We have much to rethink, reimagine and reorganise, and, my friends, little time to do it in. But the excellent introductory conversation that I had last week with you, Madame Durant, gives me comfort that we see eye to eye on the way forward. I certainly look forward, as I have said, to working with you in the coming months.

My friends, it was almost two years ago, in June 2019, that Barbados accepted the responsibility of becoming the smallest nation in the world to host UNCTAD 15. We have pushed every step of the way to deliver on our undertaking to convene a fully participatory in-person Conference in Bridgetown. But of course that was before COVID.

Because of COVID-19, we have had cause to explore safe bubbles and biospheres, to reconfigure spaces and locations, to postpone the Conference date, not once, but twice.

Regrettably, it has now become clear to my Government that we are running out of time and options to stage UNCTAD 15 in the manner that we had originally envisaged. Equally, the UNCTAD Secretariat felt the same way as

we did, and we met last Friday and took a decision that we would now seek to have a Virtual Conference.

The intensifying global spread of COVID-19; the appallingly inequitable distribution of vaccines globally; the uncertainties of international travel and of likely participation numbers, and the reality of protecting our own population here – all make it impractical for us to continue to plan or to simply hope for the best. We all know that hope is not a strategy.

The Secretary General and I therefore consulted, as I said, last week, and we agreed that it can no longer be convened, physically. But like with all things in life, let us see what we can do to break new ground in this first virtual staging of the UNCTAD Conference.

We have accepted, also, the adverse implications that a further delay would have had and that is why we felt that, simply, let us get on with the task of hosting this virtually.

So, my friends, we have put all of this, agreeing that UNCTAD's place at the forefront of the crucial Ministerial deliberations, for being the first post-COVID-19 Conference in trade, is absolutely critical. And to that extent, what matters now is not simply the hosting of the Conference but the substance of the outcome of the Conference. If ever there was a time that the developing world needs clarity, certainty, to be seen, to be heard - especially after what it has gone through with this pandemic, and continues to go through with the inequitable distribution of vaccines - it is now.

And therefore, we believe that meeting virtually in October will allow us to meet the needs of the developing world while at the same time allow us to protect those persons who need to be protected until the world can pass the worst of this pandemic. It is regrettable that we don't appreciate that until there is safety everywhere there is truly safety nowhere.

So, my friends, this meeting therefore - as we go forward with the formal decision-making of what is normally a quadrennial Conference- has come in, obviously, to difficulties by going a year later than it would otherwise go.

We are hoping that if you cannot come to Barbados, therefore, in 2021, then we will bring Barbados to you in this Virtual Conference. And let me tell you, we cannot wait to start the journey, because we recognise that we can get into more homes, and more offices, and more boardrooms than we could if people were simply coming here. And we also recognise that we can reach different demographics to begin to popularise the battle that we have been doing over decades but, regrettably, that developing countries are still being forced to undertake because our issues pertaining to vulnerability, our issues pertaining to equitable access, our issues pertaining even, as I said, with the vaccines, continue to show an absence of moral strategic leadership that will allow the developing world to reach the SDG's and to go, indeed, from inequality and vulnerability to prosperity.

So I hope that, as we go forward, we can not only make October count, but every month between now and October must count, in building the interest, building the audience, and settling the agreement that we want to be able to inform the outcomes of not only countries' policies but ultimately other institutions globally, so that we can have a seamless approach to trade and development in this world as we go in further to the third decade of the twenty-first century.

For the record, for the rest of the programme the virtual space, therefore, now gives us that unlimited scope to make our Conference literally an exceptional experience. Last year we saw the UN General Assembly take a virtual format, and it worked, because it allowed us to have a greater reach. We believe Bridgetown and Geneva virtually in October will also work.

Our teams are full of ideas, and I am actually very excited by a lot of what I am hearing. And we can enhance the global reach of the Ministerial Roundtables as well, and other High Level Events which might not otherwise be as accessible if we were simply doing it here.

So on to October, Isabelle, and I look forward to seeing you in Geneva or in Barbados, and to working with you. As I said, you have been thrown in at the deep end with us, but we welcome you, and we hope that we will make a major difference to the development trajectory of the developing world out of this Conference. Because, as I said, if ever the world needed the voice of the developing world to be heard, it is now.

And we in the Caribbean are known, my friends, for passionate voices and creative flair. As I say, we are small in size but always big on ideas, and we look forward therefore to being able to share our story, and to be able to make that defining difference in the global agenda.

Our goal, as I have said, is to bring those voices and that flair, therefore, to you, and to imbue you so fully with the spirit, energy and dynamism of the Caribbean that most of you, even if you are not here, will want to be here, and will be taken up, and I hope will commit to coming to visit us in the period of our Chairmanship which does not end until 2024.

I have instructed my National Organising Committee members to work in close partnership with their counterparts in the Secretariat in Geneva to develop these plans. And I give you my assurances, Madam Secretary General, that Barbados will play host in a full and active way in these extraordinary circumstances, but what matters to us most now is not simply the hosting of the Conference, as we said always, but the substantive outcome of having our voices and our reality acknowledged, heard and acted upon so that we can make a defining difference in the lives of our citizens.

Thank you very much