



Statement by

**The Honourable Mia Amor Mottley, Q.C., M.P,
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, Barbados,
August 5th, 2020**

Your Excellency, Dr Kituyi, Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; Senator Dr the Honourable Jerome Walcott, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados; and the Honourable 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, who is in Geneva listening to us, our Permanent Rep. in Geneva; and members of the National Organising Committee for UNCTAD 15 and counterparts in the UNCTAD Secretariat; Representatives of the Media; Ladies and Gentlemen, friends all:

I am delighted to be able to join with you, Secretary-General -in Nairobi- I wish I was there with you –and please extend my very best to my dear friends there. But I am sorry that we are unable to be together at this point in time. Nevertheless, we recognise, from all who are participating from multiple jurisdictions, that this is a historic event. And this historic event allows us to sign the Host Country Agreement between your Secretariat, Secretary-General, as well as the Government of Barbados on arrangements for the 15th Session of this Congress.

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, and you can correct me if I am wrong, S.G. We all know the circumstances that have prompted this creative solution, which may well prove not only to be precedent setting, but indeed 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 than now.
- 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. Some may say we are mad.

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 our history has one hurricane decimated

all of our countries **all at once** in the way that this 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 the pandemic within our jurisdictions, but our tourism-dependent, open economies have had little defence against the global economic contagion that has followed. And indeed, today our Governor of the Central Bank will share with the country the extent of our decline in the second quarter as a result of zero travel for a number of months.

As you know, COVID-19 has already impacted the staging and convening of UNCTAD 15, which we have been forced to reschedule from the original dates in October of this year. It proved impossible to proceed as normal given the trajectory of the global pandemic – as we see before us every day - the closure of borders and the disruption of global air travel, as well as the suspension of physical meetings of the prep meetings and 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 S.G yourself 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 the 25th of April to the 30th of April, 2021. Pre-Conference events continue to include six Fora on Youth, Civil Society, Gender and Development, Global Commodities, the Creative Industries and Trade Digitisation, which are all planned for the 23rd and 24th of April.

The Government of Barbados is committed to delivering a Conference that allows for the universal participation of the 195 member states of UNCTAD while fully protecting the health and the safety of both the visiting delegates and the local population. We aim to provide a platform for consequential deliberation and action by Ministers and for serious engagement with civil society, young people and the private sector. Above all, we are determined to make UNCTAD 15 an inclusive and unforgettable event. Indeed S.G. the saying from you just now: “*On the Way to Barbados*” had a certain ring to it! But we intend to offer you an unforgettable and significant event with opportunities for creativity and entrepreneurship for the people of Barbados, first and foremost.

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

The global pandemic has reminded us how vulnerable and how exposed we are to shocks that threaten our very existence, let alone our development. It has reminded us of the value of family, of relationships, of the environment, of all the things in the world that we started to take for granted. And equally, the challenges to multilateralism continue to be exacerbated, regrettably, in this world, at a time when international cooperation is needed more than ever if our nations are to attain their strategic objectives and their SDGs, but, most importantly, immediately, if we are to arrest this virus.

During the past few months we have also witnessed worldwide protests, as ordinary people of all ages, races and backgrounds and stages 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 the vulnerable of the world are no longer prepared to be marginalised and forgotten, and that citizens everywhere are standing beside them in the call for radical change. You must forgive me, S.G., if I recall also the Raul Prebisch Lecture that I delivered in Geneva last year, where I reflected on the fact that for too many Small Island Developing States, our plight has been to be invisible to the global community, and in some instances, regrettably, we feel dispensable.

The remarkable convergence that we are witnessing globally demands from the international community an equally determined response. Some may choose to reflect it in the concept of reparations, some may choose to reflect it in the concept of development. But what we do know is that arbitrary criteria that lock countries and lock populations into limited access to resources cannot continue to be the order of the day, and that we have ultimately to be able to give expression to the reality that there must be fairness. Locking the inequity that was put on us 75 years ago with respect to the establishment of the United Nations, in circumstances where we have not seen the affirmative action and sufficient development opportunities for Small Island Developing States, is one of the key drivers that has put Barbados to want to host this Conference and to be able to put the issues of our small island states at the centre of the global discussion. I firmly believe that this theme therefore provides us with a real opportunity to address some of these systemic causes of the vast and growing inequalities and the inherent vulnerabilities that we have come to accept as just part and parcel of our reality. There is nothing that is acceptable about inherent vulnerability or inequality. And, to use the language of Graca Machel a few weeks ago, in a similar United Nations Forum, inequalities are man-made and therefore can be destroyed and removed by man as well. New thinking and bold action, therefore, my friends, are urgently required if we hope to

succeed in our efforts to end poverty and to provide equal opportunities for all, because that's what unites us as a people across the world.

In summary, the COVID-19 global emergency and the extreme repercussions have exposed, therefore, that need for a fundamental rethinking of those assumptions that have guided us for the last few decades, that have previously underpinned the international economic order as it has come to be. It is an order that is no longer serving the needs of too many of us across the global community. In a sudden and unexpected way the crisis, therefore, has provided the membership of UNCTAD with a unique opportunity to be at the forefront of this new thinking and radical policy corrections that the situation now requires. You and I, S.G., 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 multilateral institutions to respond to the acute and persistent development challenges of the twenty-first century.

Might I add that this is even more appropriate now after listening to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his Nelson Mandela address a few weekends ago, where he called for a new global deal and a new social contract. Now that is exactly where we are seeking to go with respect to this Conference and the question is: will sufficient countries across the global community summon the political will to rise to this great challenge for this new global deal and this new social contract that is so patently required if we are to move and to sustain: move our people forward and sustain our earth.

As host of the Conference, the Barbados Government anticipates that Ministers will debate and provide, therefore, leadership on a range of issues, some of which you've have spoken about, S.G.. These include, of course: the impact of COVID-19, not just on trade and development as we know it, but also on our ability to be able to attain the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030, as you said, because at the end of the day, that is what we are all charged to do at the domestic level. We will also hopefully discuss and consider elements related to the future of the multilateral trading system; the nexus between health and trade and policy formulation that is now so evidently needed; the measurement of vulnerability and the management of debt, especially given that all countries across the entire global family have had to be able to deal with some level of increased debt as a result of our ability to manage the cessation of revenue, as well as the increased expenditure that we've had to undertake in the context of COVID. And to that extent, how do we deal with what is an acceptable measurement of debt for macroeconomic stability, given the fact that this has impacted all of us globally. We will address, as well, the structural transformation of developing countries, many of which feel that they were never given the policy framework or flexibility to build on their development at the time of independence; the growth of the digital economy that has now become that glue that has kept the world together at a time when physical movement has had to stop;

the impact of climate change on trade and development, and indeed on the capacity of Small Island Developing States to survive as nation states; trade facilitation and transportation; the importance, of course, of regional integration in building resilient value and supply chains to strengthen our business community systems and to deal with what must now be one of our major objectives, food security.

And of course, there is the unfortunate reality that if we don't do all of this in a way to avoid the experience of the last few months where the global trading system looked more like the wild, wild, wild West than it did like anything that was ordered by human beings to suit the third decade of the 21st century. We hope we never have to experience that reality again, where we understood in a very real way what it is like to be small and to be bullied and to be left alone in the corner of the world without access to critical goods and services and in-vitro therapeutics needed to fight off this pandemic.

Secretary-General, I also therefore eagerly await your report to the Conference, which I understand will serve as a main input to 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. And I know, S.G., that we started last year reflecting on its future through the Eminent Persons Group that you gathered, which you accorded Barbados the honour of being able to serve in, as well as to reflect our perspective and that of Small Island Developing States.

My friends, there is another input, and we all know, that the Government of Barbados offered to this process in the form of the Global Commission on Trade and Development Options 2020. Professor the Right Honourable Owen Arthur, a former Prime Minister of Barbados and an eminent regional and international statesman, was appointed as Chairman of the Commission. And when I invited him to do so, he enthusiastically accepted and worked with his fellow Commissioners to have final conclusions and recommendations available, in the near future, as an independent contribution to the preparatory process for UNCTAD 15. Owen Arthur's untimely death, on July 27th, has deprived Barbados, the Caribbean and Small Island Developing States of an exceptional nation-builder and regional integrationist. It has deprived the international community of one of the most ardent advocates for the concerns of small states. As a mark of respect for the late Prime Minister Arthur we postponed the signing of this agreement and this ceremony until today. As a tribute to his memory we intend to complete and to build upon the work of the Commission, and to find a fitting way to honour his legacy during UNCTAD 15. I think anyone who knew Owen Arthur would tell you that his passion was

international trade and how it impacted on small states and vulnerable people; how it also created opportunities for them.

I look forward, therefore, Secretary-General, to being able to join you and your team and all of the other member states when you come to Barbados. But, as we close, I'd like to thank all who have laboured hard to bring us to this point. It has not been easy, either in Geneva or in Barbados, and to the extent that your paths have been interrupted by COVID-19, your efforts are even all the more appreciated by our Government, and, I am sure, by the rest of small island states who are looking to this Conference to be a path-breaker for the development opportunities and the policy options available to us all.

My friends, in signing this Agreement my country 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. For that was why the United Nations was formed 75 years ago. If I have but one regret with the postponement of this Conference it is that instead of us being able to celebrate as a global community on October 24th, those 75 years, we will have to hold it in our hearts and wait until 2021 to come together and give that true celebration that hopefully will be allowed at that time because of the progress of the work of our scientists globally.

I want to thank each and every one of you and to look forward to full deliberations in the course of UNCTAD 15, and for it to be said, truly, that a small state has come forth and that a small state has given voice to the expressions and the desires and the aspirations of billions across this Earth who feel that their opportunity and their chances at trade and development must be as real as the largest among us.

I thank you.