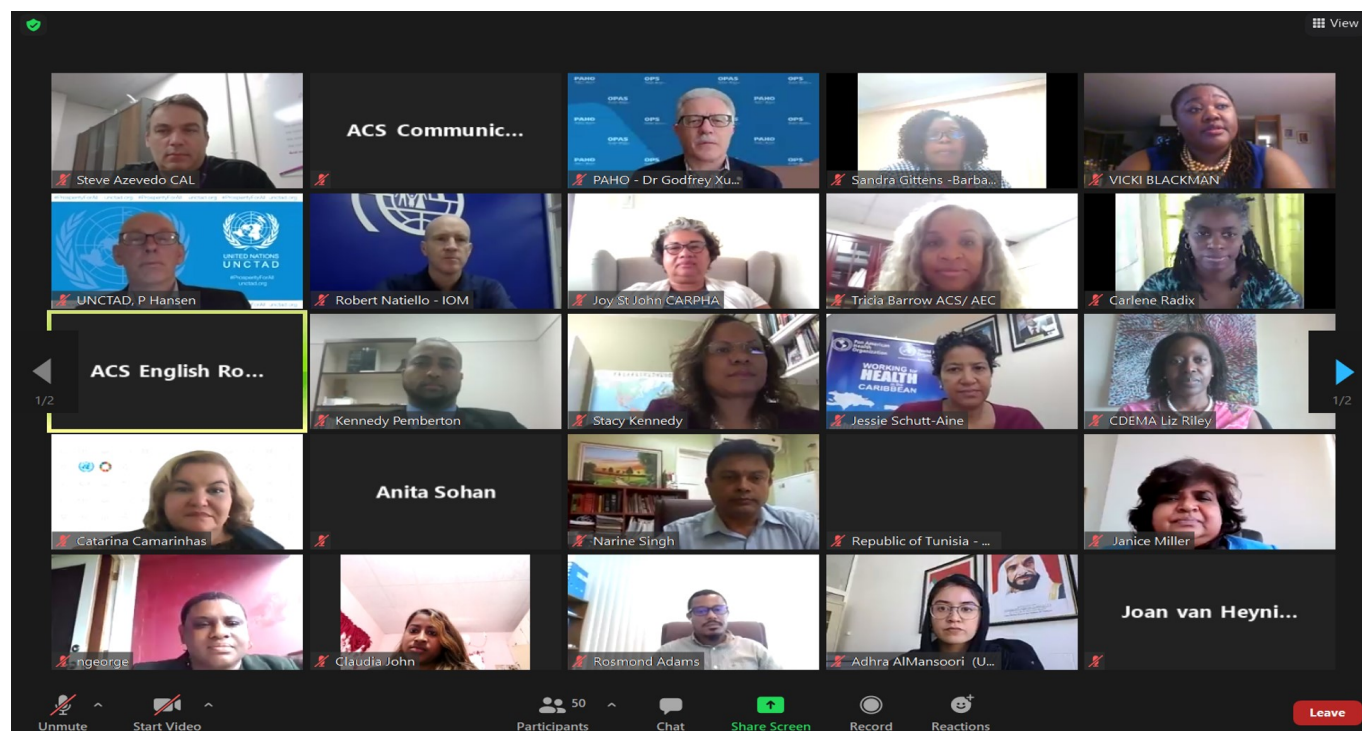


## Press Release on the Inaugural Meeting of the ACS Multi-Stakeholder Task Force on COVID-19



### PRESS RELEASE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE ACS MULTI-STAKEHOLDER TASK FORCE ON COVID-19

The ACS Multi-Stakeholder Task Force on COVID-19 met virtually on 8th March to exchange views on sub-regional and regional efforts and best practices to safeguard public health and economic recovery in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Underscoring that as the most rapid and effective means of combating the pandemic and promoting economic recovery, vaccination against COVID-19 has become a global priority, the Task Force expressed concern about misinformation and speculation and inequities the world over, but particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean regarding availability, access to and distribution of vaccines. The Task Force stakeholders expressed support for shows of solidarity as it regards equitable access to medical supplies, including vaccines. Noting that the European Union was the first contributor to COVAX, providing 50% of the capitalisation of the mechanism, meeting stakeholders urged the mechanism to fast-track the distribution of vaccines approved by the World Health Organisation (WTO).

The Meeting brought together Representatives from ACS Members, Observers, the public and private sector and regional and sub-regional organisations to share information on ongoing efforts in respect, inter alia, of vaccine distribution, health protocols, social protection, capacity building to enhance response, support for vulnerable populations, and transport and trade. Participants shared their experiences, best practices and lessons learnt in respect of the vaccination process, and efforts by the public, private and social sectors to support national and regional initiatives to help, rebuild better and enhance resilience.

In this regard, the Task Force reaffirmed the importance of multilateralism and underscored the

need for regional, bilateral and sectorial actions to counteract the negative effects of the pandemic on work, trade and the well-being and living conditions of the citizenry of ACS Member States and Associate Members.

The Task Force acknowledged with deep appreciation the generosity and solidarity of several ACS Member States in sharing vaccines and medical supplies, but recognised the need to promote regional and international interventions in support of the most vulnerable countries of the Region. Even as stakeholders welcomed national, regional and international efforts to improve public health, air and maritime transport, tourism, trade and quality of life, they underscored the need to re-double efforts to ensure the Region's recovery and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Noting that the Inaugural Task Force Meeting was being held on International Women's Day, the Task Force drew attention to the fundamental enabling role of women in confronting this mammoth challenge to humanity.

The Task Force recognised the importance of focussing on equitable access to and distribution of vaccines, the enhancement of national and regional capacities to develop and facilitate the transport, storage and distribution of vaccines; enforce health measures; implement health and well-being programmes and put in place measures to reactivate trade, air and maritime transport and internal markets.

They emphasized that equity can only be achieved if vaccines are accessed, in a timely manner, by the most vulnerable, including women, children ethnic minorities and the indigenous, who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

The meeting was informed about the call made by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) for a global summit to discuss inequitable access to vaccines to address the pandemic. The ACS Secretariat undertook to consult on this initiative with its Membership with a view to supporting it.

Determined to mobilise to the fullest all regional capacities to educate, empower and protect Greater Caribbean citizens, and mindful of the Region's history of successful vaccination drives, the Task Force used the opportunity of the encounter to exchange best practices regarding preparations for and rollout of vaccination programmes. They agreed on the need for a standard protocol for communicating with the Regional public and to this end undertook to share reliable information on official websites and to continue to promote standard health protocols.