

## Leaders Agree to Cooperate to Establish Caribbean Programme for Sargassum



Several countries, territories and organisations in the Greater Caribbean have agreed on a declaration that will see them researching and protecting their populations from the hazards of Sargassum Seaweed. They have agreed to establish a “Caribbean Programme for Sargassum”, which will model and monitor, establish logistics, consider utilization and appropriate disposal of Sargassum. Leaders and representatives from the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), the Organisation of American States (OAS), and many countries in the Caribbean signed a declaration at the First International Conference on Sargassum organised by the Regional Council of Guadeloupe.

The leaders agreed that there is not enough information about the impact of Sargassum and the impact of the invasive seaweed is enough to strengthen cooperation, pool resources to boost knowledge, forecast, collect, and examine the impact and use of Sargassum, which has littered Caribbean coasts since 2011. The Caribbean Programme for Sargassum will be financed by the European Territorial Cooperation Fund (INTERREG) and led by the Region of Guadeloupe.

President of the Regional Council of Guadeloupe Ary Chalus stresses the importance of a regional approach in tackling the stream of problems caused by the almost-annual Sargassum blooms. “It is clear that we will not stop here, otherwise it will be detrimental to the economy of our countries. We continue to fight and provide assistance to communities impacted by the invasion of Sargassum... so that they do not lose hope. Therefore, I was very pleased to host this International Conference on Sargassum which, I hope, will open a door of hope.”

ACS Secretary General Dr. June Soomer says the rich discussions at the conference and Sarg’Expo, the first ever international trade show have been fruitful. “We have been talking about it since 2011. I was very pleased because we discussed solutions, opportunities and innovations in this area. In addition, we spoke as one for the first time by making a major regional political statement which, I hope, will have an international impact. Caribbean ingenuity blooms, at least as richly, if not more so than Sargassum”.

French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe, who attended the Conference says, "... facing the same problem pushed us to unite our efforts in order to formulate an efficient, coordinated response to Sargassum washing up on our shores. This is why the final Declaration that we just adopted and just revised, indicates the need to respond to this sargassum influx through multilateral cooperation, in the same vein as the Cartagena Convention, which creates a multilateral framework of dialogue to manage and mitigate natural risks and pollution."

The Inaugural International Sargassum Conference and Expo was a forum to discuss the threat to Caribbean economies, lifestyles and culture posed by the seasonal seaweed. The events brought together politicians, diplomats, scientists, youth, community groups, researchers and entrepreneurs, to conceive culturally-friendly solutions to the hazard.

The countries represented at the Conference include: Barbados, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Lucia, St. Kitts & Nevis, Anguilla, Montserrat, British Virgin Islands, Martinique, Saint Martin, Saint Barthelemy, France, French Guiana, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Mexico.