

**Tenth UK-Caribbean Forum (Virtual)**  
**“Shared Values”**  
**Remarks delivered by Hon. Eamon Courtenay**  
**Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration of Belize**  
**Thursday, 18 March 2021**

One full year into the COVID-19 pandemic, our world continues to contend with unprecedented changes and challenges. The global social and economic disruption has widened and deepened inequality everywhere, among our own citizens and between our countries. Decades of progress we had made in the fight against poverty and in fostering sustainable development have been reversed. Small island developing states of the Caribbean, with limited capacity to cope with the full impact of the pandemic are in the most precarious of positions.

The only way to tackle the virus and its profound, long-term consequences is through international partnerships like ours driven by mutual respect, solidarity, and shared values.

Our shared values must underline our collective recovery and result in more resilient, and inclusive societies and more sustainable global development.

Among our most enduring of our shared values is our deep commitment to multilateralism.

But our shared commitment to multilateralism must be more than an alignment of our approaches to global decision-making. It must deliver tangible benefits for our populations. And among the most immediate needs of our people is access to COVID-19 vaccines. Our mutual economic recovery demands equitable access.

Therefore, we need, with urgency, to address the inequitable access and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. To date, the 26,000 vaccines we have received in Belize is the result of South-South cooperation, originating with a single donor. Though we anticipate COVAX deliveries rolling out in the Caribbean soon, we regret that its vaccine distribution has been slowed by vaccine nationalism, hoarding, and side deals between developed countries and vaccine manufacturers.

We appreciate the leading role that the UK has played in the development of vaccines and as a major donor to COVAX. We are counting on the UK to challenge the undermining of COVAX and abide by its pledge to donate its surplus vaccines to the COVAX for distribution to developing countries.

The pandemic is not the only ongoing global crisis we face: the climate crisis continues unabated. And again our shared value in building resistance to climate related risks is a foundation for joint actions.

## CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

COP26 will be an opportunity for the international community to commit to ambitious action to bring the world closer to the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Belize calls on the UK, as incoming COP26 President, to encourage and support countries in submitting ambitious National Determined Contributions. We in the Caribbean envision a future in which we are resilient with sustainable agriculture, nutrition-sensitive food security, climate-resilient infrastructure and transportation systems.

Human development and the protection and empowerment of women, youth and other marginalized groups have been an essential component of our shared values.

We acknowledge and pay tribute to the long history of the Chevening and Commonwealth Scholarship programmes which have been instrumental in the capacity-building of our public service and the wider professional sector. It is a proud legacy.

Our shared values are rooted in a common culture, language, and historical experience. We want to see an enhanced presence of the British Council in the Caribbean. The future will be driven by science, technology, renewable energy, climate management — these are the areas which we should prioritise for education, research and collaboration. In doing so our shared values and our partnership will strengthen our people-to-people bonds and for building inclusive and equitable societies to which we mutually aspire.

Our Forum has long recognized the human and economic consequences of infectious diseases, a recognition which has particular resonance today as we fight the pandemic. At the same time in the Caribbean, we struggle with arresting the steady rise of non-communicable diseases. It is striking that given the UK's world-renowned National Health Service we have not, in our Action Plan to be adopted today, developed our cooperation in the area of health to complement the Strengthening of Health Infrastructure Programme. Given the importance of health to development, this is a glaring omission that should be corrected.

Excellencies, our shared values have been the bedrock of the United Kingdom - Caribbean partnership. Our joint commitment to the rules-based international order, to the principle of self-determination, and to the primacy of the United Nations Charter secured Belize's independence in 1981. These principles are the foundation of our existence as an independent nation-state. It is our unwavering faith in these principles that has guided all of our actions as we grapple with the legacy of the territorial claim of Guatemala, including our decision to peacefully settle the claim at the International Court of Justice. I must express the deep appreciation of Belize to the UK and the Caribbean for your equally unwavering faith in these principles and for your longstanding support of our sovereignty.

Indeed, the UK is not just a transatlantic partner. It has Overseas Territories in our region. In this sense we are really neighbours with a common responsibility and shared interest in the wellbeing and prosperity of our neighbourhood. From rolling out COVID vaccines to rapid deployment of disaster response to its Overseas Territories, the UK is active in our neighbourhood and we want to see similar cooperation extended to the wider Caribbean.

## CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Our shared values have stood the test of time. But they are being tested now as never before.

Climate Change, COVID-19 and cataclysmic debt burdens present existential crises. Our shared values suggest we can respond together. We must.

I repeat the clarion call of our UN Secretary General “Only together can we end this pandemic and recover. Only together can we revive our economies. And then, together, we can all get back to the things we love.”

I am confident that the Caribbean and the UK, acting together, on the basis of our shared values will contribute to effective multilateralism, to the sustainable development for our countries and peoples and to a just international system.

I look forward to our continued friendship and engagement as equal partners.

Thank you.