



CARIBBEAN
HOTEL & TOURISM
ASSOCIATION

January 6, 2021

Honourable Marc Garneau M.P.
Minister of Transport
Office of the House of Commons
Parliament Hill Office
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A6

Dear Minister:

Effective January 7, 2021 the Government of Canada is requiring that all residents and travelers entering Canada from the Caribbean provide proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR test before their planned departure to Canada.

As we've moved towards implementation of this policy on short notice, it is creating challenges and stands to place even greater economic hardship on the people and Governments of the Caribbean and thousands of Canadians who are currently in the Caribbean and scheduled to return in the coming weeks.

The mere announcement of the policy has resulted in an influx of cancellations by Canadians who were scheduled to travel to our region, further impacting our already fragile businesses and economies and keeping more employees from returning to work.

As the policy takes effect, in the coming days we anticipate many stranded Canadians being unable to return home due to their inability to get tests in the required time.

We recognize that the intention of the policy is to help minimize the risk of Covid-19's spread in Canada, an objective which we share. Our commitment to the health safety of residents and travelers is best demonstrated by the Covid-19 protocols and containment measures which have been put in place throughout the Caribbean. This is further reinforced as the number of Covid-19 incidents known to have been transmitted through tourists in the Caribbean is extremely low.

On behalf of the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association and the 32 National Hotel and Tourism Associations throughout the region which are part of our Federation, we respectfully request reconsideration of this policy for the Caribbean.

Our region's success in maintaining one of the lowest incident rates of Covid-19 in the world in large measure is due to the stringent health safety and testing measures which are in place, the leadership of many of our Governments, and the strong partnerships between health and tourism interests we've had in recent years. Our health safety protocols can be found at <http://www.caribbeanhotelandtourism.com/health-safety-resources/> and are the basis for health safety training which thousands of employees have participate in since June, 2020. They have been recognized by our health safety partners - the Caribbean Public Health Agency, the Caribbean Tourism Organization, and the World Travel and Tourism Council.



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Our main challenge in meeting this new entry requirement by the Canadian Government is one of capacity. Nearly all Governments within the Caribbean, many small island states with limited health facilities and resources, lack the capacity to conduct the volume of PCR tests, and do not have on hand the amount of equipment and the processing capabilities necessary to meet this requirement. The limited PCR testing capacity we do have is presently directed primarily towards our citizens. Additionally, our ability to attain additional test kits and reagents with such a short notification has been difficult.

The longstanding bonds between Canada and the Caribbean have been integral to the socio-economic development of the Caribbean and our stability. The ties, particularly around tourism and financial services, have spawned and supported countless businesses, generated over 2.8 million tourism-related jobs, and bolstered Government revenue, with tourism alone representing as much as over 90 percent of GDP for small Caribbean economies like Aruba and the British Virgin Islands.

As the spigot of tourism dollars has slowed considerably, at no other time in the Caribbean's history has tourism been as important to our socio-economic well-being than now. While Canadians who travel to the Caribbean represent a small percentage of those Canadians who do travel to other countries, further minimizing the risk of contagion upon their return, they represent a significant percentage of overall travelers to our shores and their contribution to our GDP.

We respectfully ask for serious consideration as we join airlines, including your country's flag carriers, and others in requesting a relaxation in implementing this measure for the Caribbean. This would allow Caribbean jurisdictions sufficient time to determine their ability to meet the testing requirement or advance alternative measures which might be implemented, including the use of antigen tests approved by the World Health Organization. Concurrently, please be assured of our ongoing commitment to the health safety of travelers and residents, including the good people of Canada.

Sincerely,

Pablo Torres
President

cc:

The Honourable Dr. Ralph Gonsalves
Prime Minister, Chairperson, CARICOM and Chair of CARICOM Transportation Portfolio
Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines
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