

Full free movement by October 1

4 Caricom countries on board; Jamaica pressing ahead

■ MONTEGO BAY

Four Caribbean countries- Barbados, Belize, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Dominica-have signalled their intention to allow freedom of movement as of October 1, according to an article published by the *Jamaica Observer* yesterday.

The article also stated that Jamaica's Prime Minister Dr Andrew Holness has indicated that his country is working towards joining them soon.

Speaking on Tuesday evening in his capacity as chair of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) Holness told a media briefing at the end of the 49th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the regional bloc there was consensus that the pace and scope of implementing the Caricom Single Market and Economy (CSME) 'was just too slow', the *Observer* reported. An integral component of the CSME, free movement guarantees all Caricom nationals the right to unrestricted travel to live and work within member countries.

'I'm pleased to share that we are now moving from applying administratively the Protocol on Enhanced Cooperation, which all member states have signed, with now four countries-Barbados, Belize, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Dominica reiterating their willingness to implement full free movement under the protocol, starting October 1, 2025,' Holness said as he summed up ground covered during the conference which ran from July 6 to 8.

'I want to make clear that Jamaica remains committed to implementing full free movement in accordance with the treaty amendments, and we are also examining ways to speed up our own implementation,' he added.

According to the *Observer*, also high on the agenda over the last few days was how the regional bloc intends to pivot in response to mounting economic pressure from external trade tariffs following US President Donald Trump imposition earlier this year of a 10% base tariff on goods from a large number of Caribbean countries, part of his wider effort to correct what he saw as an imbalance that was not in America's favour.

Holness spoke of the need to act quickly to implement plans long spoken of at the regional level.

'The question is: 'What are you going to do with this new base tariff that's implemented?' Well, one of the things we have to do is to diversify our trade; and now it's not just a matter of talk, it is an urgent matter,' he said in response to a question posed during the media briefing.

'As a region, we've long been talking about strengthening trade cooperation: South-South, with Africa, Central and South America and even within Caricom,' he added.

Holness noted that trade within Caricom now accounts for 'probably less than 15% ... relative to total trade'.

As he spoke to the various countries' competitive advantages and how they can be used as a strong intra-regional basis for trade, he conceded that there are hurdles that need to be addressed, the article stated.

'Internally within Caricom there are still some non-tariff barriers and other measures that form an obstacle to trade,' the Caricom chair said.

'We have put together a committee-headed by the foreign ministers, ministers of trade of Jamaica and Barbados- to seriously examine how we can reduce, if not totally remove, these non-tariff barriers and to standardise procedures across the board to facilitate greater trade intra- regionally,' Holness assured.