



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs

MEDIA RELEASE

GOVERNMENT RESPONDS TO ERRONEOUS STATEMENTS ON THE PROCUREMENT OF COVID-19 VACCINES

PORT OF SPAIN: 19TH FEBRUARY, 2021

The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health, has noted a series of erroneous references to the procurement of COVID-19 vaccines in the Trinidad Guardian of 19th February, 2021.

The Trinidad Guardian went so far in its editorial to opine that Trinidad and Tobago's decision to wait on the "validation" of the World Health Organization before exploring India's AstraZeneca option "seems unnecessary". This was an unfortunate statement from a leading newspaper, and it was associated with repeated and consequent references to "lateness" and "tardiness" in seeking to acquire an Indian-made vaccine for COVID-19.

The reality is that a fundamental criterion of our public health sector for the provision of any vaccines to our national population is the approval of such vaccines by the World Health Organization. Such approval is deemed by our public health experts as essential to ensure that the administered vaccines are both safe and effective. This applies to all vaccines, from any source across the globe. In addition to the safety and efficacy factors, our public health officials have also taken into consideration significant scepticism to the new COVID-19 vaccines by some members of the population, and this further underscores the importance of utilizing properly authorized vaccines.

Prime Minister Keith Rowley has repeatedly, emphatically, and correctly stated that we will only offer to the public vaccines that are approved by the World Health Organization. If we offered unapproved vaccines and persons became ill or died as a result, the same editorial spaces that were casting doubt on the need for approval would be very unlikely to refrain from condemnation of the Government.

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It is a matter of public record that the AstraZeneca Covishield vaccine that is manufactured by the Serum Institute of India only achieved approval onto the World Health Organization's EUL on Monday 15th February 2021, which was literally this week. Therefore, any immediate steps taken by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago upon such approval should be regarded not as "tardy" but rather as proper, prompt, and responsibly-conducted.

The bigger picture is that in September 2020 (five months ago) the Government of Trinidad and Tobago formally signed the commitment agreement with Covax toward the acquisition of up to 900,000 doses of approved COVID-19 vaccines for our population during the year 2021. We have also been in consistent bilateral dialogue with the actual manufacturers of the range of available vaccines since then, commencing in October 2020 and based on the fundamental criterion of WHO approval.

The reality is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago remains fully committed to administering only vaccines that are approved as safe and efficacious as part of our national response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will continue to be guided by the Ministry of Health's public health experts with regard to the selection and timing of any purchases of new vaccines. The population can remain assured that the best decisions are being taken in the interest of the safety and health of the nation.

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