



# ‘DOORS OPEN’

## SUPPORT FOR KEEPING BORDERS OPEN

by Marlon Madden

Several tourism officials are defending Government’s decision to keep the country’s borders open to visitors from around the world despite the fear associated with the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

The man charged with the marketing of the island, Chairman of the Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc. (BTMI) Sunil Chatrani said he was in favour of the borders staying open, but warned that officials should be sensible in how they manage people coming in.

“We are a tourism destination. We can’t say that we are shutting down everything and then still trying to encourage people. We have to be sensible about how we do it and we have to take all the necessary precautions,” he said.

“We are a small island and as long as we do the right thing at the airport and seaport and we have the mechanism to control it, we have to be sensible. This island is too small to start shutting off borders completely. We are totally dependent on tourism and when you think about the contribution it is quite significant so we can’t afford to shut it down,” insisted Chatrani.

Lauding Barbados for following the guidelines of the World Health Organisation (WHO), President of the Airline Association of Barbados Oliver Haywood said he was happy that Barbados had not closed its borders.

“So the question would arise, what is so different to Barbados or Barbadians and the Barbados Government when you see others closing their borders?” he said.

So far, Trinidad and Tobago has announced a closure of its borders to non-nationals for two weeks in its attempt to curtail the spread of the virus.

Several countries have also announced a ban on direct flights from Europe while some implemented a ban on foreign nationals who have travelled to and from some of the most affected countries in Asia in the past month.

Others who also have confirmed cases of the virus, including Barbados, have so far only announced a ban on some public gatherings. In the case of Barbados, Government has announced a restriction on public gatherings of no more than 100 people.

Prime Minister Mia Mottley said Government had taken the decision not to close the borders at this time.

Past chairperson of the Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA) Roseanne Myers agreed that the island’s borders should remain open.

“What every good leader needs basically are good followers. So we will stand behind a decision to keep the borders open based on the discussions that had gone on,” said Myers.



Sunil Chatrani



Roseanne Myers



Kerrie Symmonds



Lisa Cummins

However, she warned: “If your borders are open you have to do everything to screen and test and check that the persons coming in who may be exhibiting some symptoms are dealt with in an expeditious manner and in a

manner that the WHO rules recommend.”

The officials were speaking at the first quarterly meeting of the BHTA at the Hilton Resort on Tuesday.

Minister of Tourism Kerrie Symmonds

argued that while people go on social media platforms and “ventilate” their views, they should understand that a lack of financial certainty could be “a deal maker or deal breaker” in this country if not managed well.

Pointing out that the country was still emerging from a recession, the politician said Government had to ensure that it kept those “on razor-thin margins” and those below the poverty line from “going under completely”, suggesting that closing the borders could spell disaster.

“It is easy to say close a border. The question then becomes for how long? The next question is how do people pay mortgages, how do people feed themselves?”

Chairperson of the Barbados Port Inc. Senator Lisa Cummins also dismissed the notion that the island should stop incoming travel of non-nationals.

“Steady, measured, informed leadership will require us to make solid decisions driven by the science as Prime Minister Mia Mottley has said because when we come out from this, the people who will suffer the most will be among those who were once heard calling for a closure of borders.

“It will be those people whose jobs are affected, it will be those people who are unable to get their products on shelves and who are unable to get their medications,” she said, adding that the decision to keep a border open or closed at this time was a “difficult” one.

“The question of keeping a border open I am fully persuaded that [the Prime Minister] is being guided by all of the various considerations and stakeholders and concerns and social media conversations, but at the end of the day she is ‘still the person to whom we will all ask ‘why don’t we have jobs yet?’ So she can’t close a border until she has been able to answer you on the other side,” said Cummins.

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The audience at the first quarterly meeting of the BHTA at the Hilton Resort on Tuesday.