

The St. Kitts Nevis Chamber of Commerce Meets with the COVID-19 Task Force



On July 7th, 2020, The St. Kitts Nevis Chamber of Industry and Commerce hosted a meeting with the COVID-19 Task Force. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Chamber's Board of Directors and The Chairman of the Task Force – Mr. Abdias Samuel, Dr. Hazel Laws -Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and other Executive Members of the Task Force.

The meeting was aimed at discussing plans for business continuity amid the pandemic within various business sectors including in particular the Tourism Sector, the Manufacturing Sector, and the International Universities.

Mr. Abdias Samuel, Chairman of the COVID-19 task force noted that while the introduction of the virus to the island remains a reality, his team along with the Ministry of Health have a responsibility to ensure balanced decision making and must consider the risks to resident's mental health, public health and economic activity generation in the Federation.

According to Dr. Hazel Laws- Chief Medical Officer (CMO), the COVID-19 pandemic is worsening globally. With no vaccine or alternative treatment, following simple measures including Hand Hygiene, Social and Physical Distancing is what will help us to remain safe and keep the country opened. She stated that the Caribbean Public Health Agency continues to underscore the risk of reimportation of the virus as we make plans for reopening the borders. The Ministry of Health has been working on a Port Health plan for Port health surveillance and have already completed digitization of all screening tools at the airport. Preparation efforts would also require physical infrastructural changes at the airport. Dr. Laws underscored the importance of adequate preparation and strategic planning for the reopening of the borders with an impending second wave of COVID-19.

Much discussion is taking place at various governmental levels and particular the Tourism Authorities on a date suitable to the Hotel Sector in particular.

Manufacturing Sector

All Factories have reopened and are operational. Approval for increase in numbers of staff to be allowed to return to work rely on the individual plants ability to accommodate the number of employees while maintaining the capacity to adhere to the regulations and guidelines for physical distancing, social distancing, and sanitization methods. The Chairman highlighted that Plants (Factories) must bear in mind that the task force has to abide by these regulations in order to keep people safe and safeguard the health care system. As such approval for additional employees within a given facility would not be approved unless full compliance is met at all levels.

Some plants faced challenges in achieving compliance for additional staff requests and have been asked to put the necessary measures in place before reaching out to the Task Force for inspection and approval. To date, 785 employees from the manufacturing sector have been able to return to work from a total work force of 1047.

Tourism Sector

“COVID-19 will be here for at least the next 24 months” Mr. Samuel highlighted. Hotels need to be able to train their staff and prepare their facilities to allow for quarantine and isolation of guests as required. The Task Force is continuously engaging in the processes of assessing the risk associated with the Tourism Sector and has had discussions with Hoteliers, Tour Operators and Restaurants and Bars in terms of their capacity and readiness to reopen to the local market. While several Restaurants, Bars and small hotels have indicated their readiness for reopening, large hotels have stated that they are not ready to reopen until October 01 2020 and would need to provide adequate training to their staff to work within the new protocols and outfit their facilities to work with the new system. The Task Force must therefore consider the Federation’s readiness for reopening the borders by October 1st, 2020.

International Universities

The St. Kitts & Nevis government has been working closely with the universities to develop a comprehensive plan for the return of international students to the Federation.

Ross University has received approval to bring in 138 students who are expected on island on July 8th 2020. A robust plan has been submitted, reviewed and assessed thoroughly prior to application. This plan includes pre-screening for signs of COVID-19 where students will be pre-tested in the US for COVID-19 before returning to the

Federation and again upon arrival into St. Kitts. The students will then be required to remain quarantined for a period of two-weeks -on their campus housing facility supervised by the Royal St. Christopher and Nevis Police Force. Following the 14-day quarantine, students will be tested for a third time. The university has ensured students must adhere to all physical distancing, social distancing and safety protocols.

UHMS has been approved to bring back 130 students in the coming weeks. All other Universities whose facilities have been approved will need to follow the same approach and guidelines.

The Ministry of Finance has urged that the decision to reopen the borders be made slowly as it would be more cost-effective for the Country to prevent a public health disaster. The Task Force called on the Business Community to employ more creative solutions to co-exist with COVID-19 as the Government seeks to strike a balance between Public Health & Safety and Economic generation.

The Task Force engaged the Chamber in a question and answer session where Board members also made recommendations for consideration on how the Business Community could better support the work of the Task Force. It was suggested by the CIC that a member of the business community or Tourism Sector should be engaged regularly on the Task Force to be able to bring a business perspective to the deliberations.

The Chamber reiterated its interest and commitment to the work of the COVID-19 Task Force and reminded the meeting of the broad cross-section of the business community it represents. It would appreciate being actively engaged in the consultative process for the continued reopening of the business community and further opening of the economy. The President urged the Task Force to reach out to the Chamber without hesitation, for assistance, guidance and to further educate the members of the Chamber on all issues related to the COVID-19.