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STATEMENT TO THE
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JAMAICA'S PATHWAY TO RECOVERY POST COVID-19

Mr. President, Director General, Mr. Guy Ryder, distinguished delegates and observers, I would like to begin by congratulating the ILO in forging ahead with this year's Conference, utilizing the virtual space.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has had a devastating impact on Jamaica, and indeed, the whole Caribbean. We have suffered from loss of lives, business closures, disruption in trade, and increased unemployment. Our pursuit of the Decent Work Agenda has been threatened, however, we remain steadfast in our commitment to inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Prior to the pandemic, Jamaica was on the right economic trajectory, with an unemployment rate, in January 2020, of 7.3%, the lowest recorded in years. Following the first case of COVID-19 in March 2020, the rate of unemployment increased dramatically, to 12.6%, and by July 2020, the economy contracted by 10%. This was due mainly to the reduction in trade, fall-out in tourism, entertainment, business process outsourcing, and other service sectors.

As we moved to minimize the impact of the pandemic on businesses and the lives of our people, the government provided Tax Credits, to micro, small and medium sized entities, resulting in the return of One Billion dollars to employers. Ten Billion dollars was spent on implementing a Social and Economic Support Programme called the CARE Programme. This programme provided assistance to vulnerable

individuals and small businesses, as it incentivized employers in targeted sectors, to retain their employees on their payrolls.

Additionally, economic support was also provided for the sick, the elderly, the disabled, and other vulnerable groups. Employers were encouraged to utilize Flexible Work Week arrangements, and the use of technology, in order to restore productivity and to keep persons employed.

A COVID-19 Labour Market Taskforce was established to examine the impact of the pandemic on workers and employers and to provide recommendations for Labour Market resilience.

Thankfully, we have begun to see signs of recovery. The Global Services Industry, the largest provider of Youth Employment, is on the rebound. The Manufacturing Sector has begun to show growth, and the Construction Industry is on the rise, resulting in the establishment of an estimated 3,000 new companies.

Jamaica continues to work with the ILO's Regional Office on initiatives to promote Social Protection, decent, and a formal work environment. As we mark the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, we wish to thank, wholeheartedly, the ILO, for its ongoing support, as together we work to eliminate the scourge of Child Labour, and reduce the high levels of Informality.

As I close, Mr President, we must put Productive Employment and Decent Work at the centre of our Economic and Social Policies, if we are to recover from this pandemic.

Colleagues all, let us work together to bring this COVID-19 pandemic to an end.

Thank you very much.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY