

New Year Greetings from the Secretary General



Secretary General H.E. Rodolfo Sabonge's New Year Message/Reflections before the dawn of a New Year

Dear Friends,

At the close of the year, I like to reflect on the most important events that marked the year gone and anticipate the possibilities for the New Year.

Regrettably most of this year's events were linked in some way to the pandemic that has brought us so much, distress, uncertainty and pain. The pandemic brought to the fore world's institutional weaknesses, exacerbated inequities and shone a spotlight on the heavy toll of poor planning/management and corruption. Inherent and inherited social and economic vulnerabilities were exposed and exacerbated, with the most vulnerable, particularly women and girls, being disproportionately affected.

At the macro-level, the pandemic upended the supply and demand of goods and services. The decline in economic activity caused by the aforementioned contraction in supply and demand resulted in widespread unemployment and an increase in poverty. But it is at the micro level, that the effect of the pandemic has been most distressing-we have lost too many loved ones, families have been separated and, the impact of the rise in domestic violence and disruptions to our children's education is yet to be adequately measured.

In addition to the pandemic, 2020 also brought to the Region natural disasters that caused considerable casualties and destruction.

But while it has been a difficult year, on the positive side we have, in the face of loss, found a renewed appreciation for the value of family, of quality time and support especially for our most

vulnerable- values of old that were perhaps slipping away. The coming New Year must see us conquer a steep learning curve that will allow us to reap good from tragedy. We must learn that human solidarity is the key to emerging from the crisis, that collaboration is fundamental to our collective resilience and that it is by working together that we will find solutions to common problems.

2021 begins with the hope that widespread vaccination will end the pandemic, if not in the short, in the medium term. But the economic problems will not be solved in the near future. This is the time, to plan interventions together, to design strategies that help us to diversify our economies and achieve a more sustainable development. Let us take advantage of lessons learnt and undertake the necessary actions to improve governance and strengthen institutions - our health and education systems and our labour policies; promote innovation and technology and improve our interaction with nature. This is the time to work towards equity and greater transparency and to heal our planet.