

Statement by

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Minister of Financial Services and Home Affairs

National Emergency Operations Centre COVID-19 Related Activities and Hurricane Preparedness

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Members of this honourable House and the public may recall that on March 3rd the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) was activated in order to ensure that an intensive, multi-sectoral, collaborative approach to dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic was taken, with the primary focus of containing the virus in order to preserve life.

The NEOC is now in its' eleventh (11th) week of activation, which is unprecedented for the Cayman Islands. During this time, personnel in the Clusters and Emergency Support Teams within the NEOC have dealt with a myriad of challenges on a daily basis: from planning, activating and operating the Government controlled isolation facilities (that have accommodated 455 persons since 18 March); to creating and disseminating daily communications; and sourcing and distributing thousands of items of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the community and at supermarkets, etc. The tireless efforts of these teams, which includes the HSA, have helped the Cayman Islands to be ranked within the top 7 in the world for testing per capita.

Whilst this pandemic has presented never before seen challenges, it has also provided an opportunity for the review and refinement of existing preparedness, mitigation and response and reactivation plans. High functioning teams within the NEOC have increased their capacity for problem solving within tight timeframes and in the face of competing priorities where lives are at stake. Agility and adaptability have also been enhanced due to the rapid responses required across various sectors. Given that our national disaster response mechanism has been fully activated for over two months now, and with improvements in operations having occurred over time, it is highly likely that (as a country) we have never been as ready for an upcoming hurricane season as we are right now.

The teams across the NEOC remain steadfast and determined. The official opening of the annual hurricane exercise was held this morning; and during the two-day summit taking place today and tomorrow, teams within the NEOC will focus on ensuring that a wide range of COVID-19 related considerations are incorporated into hurricane plans, to address implications across a number of essential areas, including shelter management. Scenario stress tests will be tackled by Emergency Support Teams within the NEOC to facilitate this process and to evaluate their overall readiness for hurricane season ahead.

In closing, on behalf of the Government I wish to thank everyone from the various Ministries, Departments, SAGC's and private sector entities that have been working collaboratively with the Health Services Authority, Hazard Management Cayman Islands and all our first response agencies to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic; and in doing so, performing to the high standards expected of a world class civil service.

I also wish to thank the honourable Deputy Governor, those in the Governor's Office and members of the UK SAT Team for their ongoing support. As a Government and Civil Service, we are all doing our part and can be truly proud of what has been achieved to date.

Whilst the seasonal forecast projects that this will be an active hurricane season, I am confident that the lessons learned and enhanced ways of working that have been attained over the last few months, will stand us in good stead and enable us to effectively deal with any threats that lie ahead.