

## Public Dispute Grows Between CARICOM and Trinidad & Tobago Over Secretary General Reappointment

The dispute over Dr. Carla Barnett's reappointment has widened into a public clash, with Trinidad & Tobago questioning the process, threatening to cut CARICOM funding, and saying it will not recognize her authority beyond her current term.

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Trinidad & Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Tensions between the Caribbean Community and one of its members have now reached a boiling point, with Trinidad & Tobago declaring that it will not recognize the authority of CARICOM Secretary General Dr. Carla Barnett beyond the end of her current term in August 2026, even though the regional body says her second term is due to begin that same month following her

reappointment by a majority of member-state leaders.

During CARICOM's 50th regular Heads of Government meeting in late February, Secretary General Dr. Carla Barnett was reappointed by a majority of the leaders of member states. Trinidad & Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar was not present at the Heads of Government Retreat at which Barnett's reappointment was discussed, having reportedly departed the 4-day meeting the night before the retreat on February 26. Foreign Minister Sean Sobers was left to represent the country, but did not attend the retreat.

Immediately after the March 25 announcement of the Secretary-General's reappointment, Persad-Bissessar declared that she did not support Barnett's reappointment, and threatened to cut the country's financial contributions to CARICOM. She said the regional body "has been failing for 52 years and will continue to fail for the next 52 years. Trinidad and Tobago is not going to continue funding CARICOM at the current levels that we are providing."

Both Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar and Minister Sobers take issue with the way the reappointment was handled, arguing that the process was in violation of the Revised Treaty of Chaguramas, CARICOM's founding document. The T&T Prime Minister initially claimed that the Secretary General's reappointment was not on the agenda. Minister Sobers went further, claiming that because the Prime Ministers of Trinidad & Tobago, The Bahamas and Antigua & Barbuda were absent on the day of the retreat, the countries were "disinvited" from the activity. "We were told that we were not able to attend, which is a breach of the treaty," he contended.

The remarks sparked a public war of words between current CARICOM chair Dr. Terrance Drew, Prime Minister of St. Kitts & Nevis, and Trinidadian officials. A letter from Drew to his T&T counterpart claimed Barnett's reappointment was properly discussed under an agenda item titled "Financing and Governance of the Community." The letter also claimed that Minister Sobers was invited but had chosen to absent himself from the critical meeting citing fears of seasickness as the reason not to embark on the water taxi from St. Kitts to Nevis. Even after the renewal of Barnett's appointment was approved, an announcement was delayed due to the lack of response to several attempts at communication with Trinidad & Tobago officials, Drew said. He then invited Ms. Persad-Bissessar to an emergency meeting of CARICOM heads, scheduled for April 10.

Sobers hit back, claiming that his remark about seasickness was a joke. A letter addressed to Drew stated that multiple inquiries about his attendance were met with firm denials, with various CARICOM officials informing him that the retreat was limited to Heads of Government only. He attached the text of a WhatsApp message as evidence. Minister Sobers also informed the CARICOM chair that Trinidad & Tobago would not attend any further meetings of the organization unless furnished with answers and documentation in response to an [itemized list of questions](#). The country will also not recognize Barnett's tenure beyond the expiration of her current term in August, Sobers declared.

Trinidad & Tobago was absent from Friday's emergency meeting. On Saturday, CARICOM [issued a statement](#) which included "information related to communication with Member States in preparation for and during the Fiftieth Regular Meeting...as well as discussions and decisions taken by Heads while meeting in Retreat." The statement and attachments reiterated the claim that Minister Sobers was advised by Secretary General Barnett herself that he would be allowed to attend the retreat. The statement concluded with the hope that in the future, "it will be possible to revert to the use of internal mechanisms for addressing the challenges that rise from time to time."

However, Ms. Persad-Bissessar kept the dispute in the public domain. On Sunday, she noted that the information provided by CARICOM included eight messages regarding the custom-designed shirts Heads wore as a uniform to the retreat, but no messages about placing Secretary General Barnett's reappointment on the agenda. She claimed that the statement also omitted a WhatsApp message reportedly sent by the CARICOM Secretariat on the morning of the retreat which reiterated that the event was for Heads of Government only. The T&T Prime Minister doubled down on her Minister's assessment of Barnett's reappointment, calling the process "surreptitious, corrupted and flawed." She renewed her calls for the provision of the information requested in Sobers' letter and vowed to continue responding publicly.

Trinidad & Tobago's current antagonistic stance towards CARICOM began when Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar broke from the grouping to publicly support the United States' military actions in the region. While CARICOM expressed alarm over the U.S. campaign of deadly airstrikes against suspected drug traffickers in Caribbean waters and the invasion of Venezuela, Ms. Persad-Bissessar welcomed the offensive posture against what has been dubbed "narco-terrorism."

"Kill them all violently," Ms. Persad-Bissessar encouraged the United States, shortly before an airstrike [led to the death of two Trinidadian citizens](#) from the south of the island.