

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Jamaica Embarks on Initiative to Bring Stranded Nationals Home

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KINGSTON, Jamaica, CMC – The Jamaica government has implemented new protocols for the controlled re-entry of nationals abroad, who can now apply through a new online immigration portal for authorisation to return home.

Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Minister, Kamina Johnson Smith said that while the protocols will be executed on a phased basis, priority will be given to Jamaicans overseas who are most vulnerable and are facing the most hardship.

“If you are in the wider community, you travelled a year or two ago, you live overseas and are thinking about coming home now, just wait a little while, because the intention of this

protocol is to make sure that persons who recently travelled before travel restrictions were implemented... are able to return, and that our most vulnerable – people whom we have had to provide with accommodation, food and care packages and medication... from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through its missions overseas – we are trying to ensure that they get in first,” she said.

Johnson Smith said while Jamaican citizens have a right to return home, their re-entry will be subject to the capacity of the public healthcare system to provide quarantine and isolation facilities for each person as well as the number of healthcare professionals needed to monitor those facilities.

She added that although the new protocols provide for all Jamaicans who are stranded overseas to return home, the Government does not have the resources at this time to charter flights to bring them home or pay for their return.

“Persons will, therefore, be responsible for making their own arrangements for travel, taking into consideration the limited availability of flights.

“Accordingly, we have started informing the airlines of our protocols for controlled re-entry and advising them that nationals who still hold tickets for their airlines will now be seeking to re-book, once they have received the travel authorisation through our new online portal,” she noted.

The government said persons will be able to access the portal on the jamcovid19.moh.gov.jm website without having data, as the site will be zero-rated.

“When you go on that website, you click on immigration and you will see a form that asks you to sign in with your email,” the Minister said, explaining further that the process will require personal and health information, which will be considered by public health officials and verified by the Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency (PICA).

“When you have submitted your application, you will either get, within three days, conditional approval or you will be asked additional questions by either health officials or PICA,” Johnson Smith said.

She said Jamaicans who will be applying to return home will have to agree to a mandatory 14-day State quarantine, and on arrival will be taken to the facility straight from the airport and tested.

There are currently more than 5,000 Jamaicans overseas who have been unable to return home, owing to border restriction to incoming passengers, which has been in effect since March 23 as part of the country’s effort to contain the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19).