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PRESS RELEASE

EMBASSY & CONSULATES CONTINUE TO PLAY ROLE IN REPATRIATION PROCESS



June 12, 2020, Washington, DC – The Embassy of Saint Lucia in Washington, DC, and Consulates in North America are playing an important role in the repatriation of nationals to Saint Lucia, reports Ambassador Anton Edmunds.

The repatriation process has included the return of Saint Lucians who were crew of cruise lines that were off the coast of Florida; the movement of students from Canada to Saint Lucia via Barbados; and most recently a June 10 Jet Blue flight from New York that repatriated 94 nationals.

The Ambassador, who is also Saint Lucia’s High Commissioner to Canada, highlighted that it was the Miami Consulate that first engaged with Carnival Cruise Line, MSC Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line and Royal Caribbean International, on nationals employed by the industry. The Consulate in Miami facilitated the return of the first group of 55 seafarers via commercial flight before borders were closed.

“A hands-on approach by the Consul General and Consul informed us of the fact that we had hundreds of nationals as crew with the industry and in need. It was also the Consulate in Miami that began initial engagement with many of our students in the United States who were in need of guidance and support”, commented Ambassador Edmunds. The

Embassy and Miami Consulate continue to work closely with the repatriation team in capital on the repatriation of crew still stranded outside of the country.

Ambassador Edmunds expressed gratitude to the efforts of the Saint Lucia Consulate in Toronto for tracking the needs of students and nationals stuck in Canada, and specifically to the Consul General for ensuring that students took advantage of a May 24 WestJet flight to Barbados, and an onward charter to Saint Lucia. This opportunity to place nationals on this flight at no cost, was a result of the Embassy's engagement with the High Commissioner of Canada to Saint Lucia, who was coordinating this flight ostensibly to repatriate Canadian nationals from the Caribbean.

The most recent repatriation June 10 effort required that Washington, New York and Miami offices work closely together to ensure that nationals who had registered with the three offices, met important criteria for placement on the flight. Students with limited resources; parties whose visa status was in jeopardy; and entities stuck in the United States post visits for medical purposes were prioritized. The Consulate in New York led the effort to consolidate the various lists, and worked with the Embassy and the Saint Lucia Tourism Authority (SLTA) on finalizing arrangements with Jet Blue. New York consulate leadership saw the flight off.

The Ambassador expressed pride in his team, noting that the effort owes most of its success to the group of professionals in capital that make up the repatriation team, and who every day seek solutions on the ground, while juggling the demands of all of Saint Lucia's representative offices. He noted that transportation access is one of the most difficult hurdles that his team continues to have to address, acknowledging that we still have nationals as far away from Saint Lucia as Dubai and the Philippines. "While we are pleased with the ability to help get so many people home, we have a way to go considering the list of people we still need to facilitate. The work has only just begun", he conceded.

The Embassy would like to acknowledge the support of the various Saint Lucian Associations that have provided financial support to nationals in need, and to our too often unheralded Diaspora. Saint Lucia's Goodwill and Brand Ambassador Taj Weekes and his TOCO Foundation are also commended for their support to students stuck in the United States.

Nationals are encouraged to call their representative offices to advise as to where they are, and to ensure that they can be contacted when opportunities arise to facilitate their return to Saint Lucia.