

**The Honorable Charlie Crist (FL-13)**  
**United States Congressman**  
**House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis**  
**A Global Crisis Needs a Global Solution: The Urgent Need to Accelerate Vaccinations Around the World**  
**December 14, 2021**  
**Statement for the Record**

Thank you to Whip Clyburn, Whip Scalise, and the Members of the Select Committee for holding this important hearing on the need to increase vaccination rates around the world, and how global vaccination efforts benefit us here at home. As you discuss how best to get shots administered around the world, I respectfully request your attention to the urgency of vaccine access for our closest neighbors.

After two years, I do not need to explain to the Members of this Committee that the pandemic has affected, in some way, every corner of the globe. However, the effects of the pandemic have fallen particularly hard on Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite only making up about 8% of the total global population, the 42 countries and dependencies of Latin America and the Caribbean account for about 18% of total cases and, tragically, about 30% of all deaths worldwide.

Beyond the devastating health effects on families and communities, the economic impacts have also hit the region hard. In its October 2021 World Economic Outlook, the International Monetary Fund reported a GDP contraction of 7% in 2020 for the region, with some GDP losses in the Caribbean, driven by a drop in tourism, above 10%. For example, Jamaica, Belize, and the Bahamas reported GDP losses of 10%, 14%, and 14.5%, exacerbating the public health crisis and putting communities across the region at risk of collapse.

As the part of the world with the highest percentage of people living in urban environments, it is exceedingly difficult for even the countries with relatively robust public institutions and infrastructure to get a handle on outbreaks and community spread. For this region, as we saw in our own country, the main source of relief and recovery comes by getting people vaccinated, and I believe active U.S. engagement is critical, alongside the State Department, vaccine manufacturers, the United Nations, and the World Health Organization.

We can see this sentiment echoed in the actions and policies from the Biden Administration, pledging one billion doses for low- and middle-income countries over the next two years. While I applaud the actions of the Administration to this point, including providing millions of vaccines directly to Latin America and millions more through COVAX, the numbers show we can and should be doing more, especially for our neighbors in the Caribbean.

As of the December 8 update from the Director of the Pan American Health Organization, 20 countries and dependencies out of 42 in the region have not yet reached the World Health Organization's 40% end-of-year vaccination goal. For some of the countries, vaccine rates are particularly troubling. In Haiti, one of our closest neighbors, less than 2% of the total population has received at least one dose of the vaccine. That is shockingly low, risking more pain and suffering for a people already facing major instability and hardship.

As the rapid emergence of the omicron variant has shown, like the delta variant before it, each new transmission increases the risk of a more contagious, more dangerous, increasingly resistant mutation. It benefits all of us, all of our districts, to head off that risk as soon as possible.

I am proud to come from a state where people from all over the world decide to live. It is truly what makes Florida such a remarkable place, and the people that make their home in the Sunshine State often maintain economic and personal ties with the country from which they came. Whether it's travel and tourism, trade and business, or personal relationships, Floridians know all too well how the well-being of our closest neighbors impacts our economy and communities.

As this Committee works to realize equitable vaccine distribution, I urge you to consider the deep economic and personal impacts the pandemic has had on our neighboring nations. Focusing vaccination efforts on Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly hard hit countries like Haiti, benefits both communities here in the United States and some of the worst hit areas anywhere in the world.

I thank the Committee for giving me the opportunity to share my views on this important topic.