

# *Nine Caribbean countries Join Forces to Protect the Vulnerable*

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Castries, March 26 (teleSUR-RHC) Janetta St. Jules is a mother of seven who says she lives a life so tough, she could not afford hospital fees and gave birth at home a number of times, a few times under trees in her yard and once in her living room.

Her tough life means many times, not having enough money to send her children to school. She is seeking assistance to ensure they can receive something she never had – an education.

Saint Lucia is hosting Ministers of Social Transformation from nine Caribbean islands this week. They say high national debt and social ills over the past decade have left some islands particularly vulnerable.

They are determined to put a plan in place to protect vulnerable families like St. Jules' "In the face of increasing vulnerability to social ills, it is the recognition that the region, as a cohesive unit, possesses some level of capacity, although it may be limited, which can appropriately be leveraged against existing situations," says Saint Lucia's Social Transformation Minister, Harold Dalsan.

The Head of the OECS Secretariat Dr. Didacus Jules says the meeting represents a move from protective measures to proactive strategies to tackle poverty. "There is no question about the necessity of acting now to protect the most vulnerable, but there is also no doubt about the long-term imperative of eradicating vulnerability.

If economic growth and prosperity matter, they must mean something for the poorest," he said. But social

policy experts say small island states in the Caribbean continue to face significant poverty reduction challenges. For mothers like Janetta Jules, social protection means being able to give her children a better life than she had, but in order to do that, she needs help.

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