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## US expands Caribbean AIDS program

The United States and the Caribbean Community (Caricom) signed an agreement on Tuesday paving the way for Washington to expand an AIDS relief program to 12 Caribbean nations.

Previously, only two Caricom member-nations --- Guyana and Haiti--- and the Dominican Republic had benefited from the program introduced by the George W. Bush administration for African and Caribbean countries worst affected by HIV and AIDS.

Under the agreement, the 12 countries would get 25 million dollars annually or up to 125 million over the next five years to assist with prevention, testing, strategic information and counseling, said the charge d'affaires of the US embassy, Karen Williams.

"The focus is on partnership and working with national governments and regional programmes on ownership and support of national programmes," she said.

The new beneficiary nations are Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, The Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname.

Latest statistics show that while HIV and AIDS have stabilized in the Caribbean, AIDS-related illnesses are the fourth leading cause of death among women and the fifth leading cause of mortality among men.