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The University of the West Indies (The UWI) is reporting that it has established a task force to assist with the mobilisation of the region's public health providers to deal with the coronavirus.

The UWI says the task force will be chaired by Professor Clive Landis, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies and former Director of the George Alleyne Chronic Disease Research Centre, who has considerable experience in the field of Caribbean public health.

The university says it is currently delivering a software engineering degree programme at its joint Institute in Suzhou, China, and has a large registered cohort of Caribbean students.

It says it has engaged directly with public health officials in Suzhou, Caribbean diplomatic corps in Beijing, and the leadership of its partner university, the Global Institute for Software Engineering.

"Against the background of dealing with its internal affairs in China, The UWI has been working in close collaboration with regional health ministries and the relevant CARICOM agencies," said Vice-Chancellor of The UWI, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles in a statement today.

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The purpose, he added, is to "provide the necessary scientific data on the virus and to work with government colleagues in creating an effective communications strategy for the region."

He concluded saying, "the task force will have a critical role to play in solutions building in the immediate future".

Membership of the task force is drawn from the regional UWI medical faculties and external experts experienced in the laboratory and field deployment of an active scientific approach.

Commenting on the work of the task force, Landis stated, "it is right that The UWI should deploy its full expertise as a public academy to help Caribbean communities cope at this instance of the COVID-19 epidemic. The primary emphasis of the COVID-19 task force will be to provide accurate and reliable information through UWI tv and other channels of communication. Armed with good information and strong partnerships we will get through this viral outbreak as we did for 'swine flu', Chikungunya and Zika before it."

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