

**OPENING REMARKS BY DR. PHILOMEN HARRISON, PROJECT DIRECTOR,
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ON THE OBSERVANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF STATISTICS
(STATISTICS2013), CARICOM SECRETARIAT HEADQUARTERS, 6 MARCH 2013**

I am happy to deliver these opening remarks on the occasion of the launch of the International Year of Statistics (Statistics2013) and we are also happy to have the Member State of Guyana join us in this launch. The importance of Statistics in the Community was recognised at an early stage, since one year after its founding, the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statistics (SCCS), was established.

A major turning point in the SCCS agenda has been the **Resolution on Regional Statistical Development** and the common **Regional Statistical Work Programme (RSWP)** which were respectively passed and approved by the **Fifteenth Meeting of the Community Council of Ministers** in **2005**.

The SCCS is now supported by an Advisory Group on Statistics (AGS) that seeks to advance the development of statistics including a regional approach to Access to Micro Data and the establishment of a Caribbean Association of Professional Statisticians which is expected to be launched this year. Our International Development Partners have provided support to Statistics in recent years including:

-the **European Union(EU)** under the **Ninth European Development Fund** that supported a number of activities ranging from Statistical Programming to the Strengthening of Basic Data Sources in National Accounts, Trade Data Processing, IT Data Management, an Online Help Desk Facility and a number of training activities from Sampling Techniques to Leadership and Management training.

-an OECD-based organisation **PARIS2- Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century** supported training in Statistical Advocacy, in Strategic Planning and the convening of a High Level Forum in 2009 all of which were co-supported by the EU;

-the **Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)** has supported the development of our online Trade Information System and three projects through the **Regional Public Goods (RPG) facility** including on Statistics Legislation, Data Warehousing and Literacy Measurement.

The **UN system** has provided support in a number of areas including Data Dissemination through **UNICEF** and support has been received in the past from the **Caribbean Development Bank** and from a number of other partners.

It is clear that these partners understand the saying that, **You can't manage what you don't measure**" (see Harvard Business Review (HBR), October 2012).

Statistics2013 presents us with the opportunity to reflect on the achievements, outcomes and on the challenges that continue to impact the availability of statistics. Ultimately we need to produce statistics to **satisfy the needs of users** and that are also **"fit for purpose" in terms of quality**. Evidently some of our statistical agencies cannot satisfy the ever-increasing demands due to constraints of size and/or resources. These agencies are also facing new areas of statistics and updated international standards such as the System of National Accounts 2008, measurement of Trade Value Added; and unremunerated Work in the household. The issue of Big Data is now with us i.e. Data that are generally collected by huge corporations including Credit Card companies, through online shopping and through the use of social networks and which are likely to impact official Statistics. In this context it is stated that the **"sexy job over the next 10 years will be statisticians..."** (attributed to Hal Varian, the Chief Economist of Google, HBR October 2012).

However, it is imperative that we find mechanisms that can take us forward in this century and beyond such as identifying Best Practices and Centres of Excellence; engaging with schools/universities on the teaching of mathematics and statistics and supporting the modernisation of statistical agencies, which is already in progress in some countries. There are many applications of statistics in areas that we often take for

granted ranging from the game of chance (gambling) to finding the genetic makeup of individuals or populations through DNA testing for forensic purposes, or in determining ancestry and paternity.

During Statistics2013 statisticians should attempt to explain the true meaning of statistics to enable a better understanding and appreciation of its usefulness to the advancement of our societies, to nurture statistics as a profession among young people, to promote creativity in the sciences of probability and statistics and to enable the development of a culture of decision-making based on statistics.

I close by thanking the Ambassador of the Delegation of the EU for taking time off from his busy schedule to be with us here today, our Secretary General for his leadership and support to this launch, the staff of the Secretariat and specifically of our Public Information Unit and the Regional Statistics for their hard work and unstinting loyalty; the Chief Statistician of the GBS and his staff and finally our former Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Lolita Applewhaite for her firm support to statistics over the years.

I Thank You.

