



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY  
DR. THE RIGHT HONOURABLE KEITH MITCHELL  
PRIME MINISTER OF GRENADA  
ON THE OCCASION OF  
THE THIRD CARICOM HIGH-LEVEL ADVOCACY FORUM ON STATISTICS  
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GRENADA TRADE CENTRE**

A very warm Grenadian welcome to all delegates at this High-Level Advocacy Forum to discuss this important regional issue of statistics. A special welcome too, to our local stakeholders in statistics. Here in Grenada, we recognise the important role of statistics in our development agenda and as such, it is certainly a pleasure to host this regional event in Grenada again.

When approached by CARICOM in July last year to host this event, it was with a great sense of pride, passion and responsibility that I welcomed the opportunity for Grenada to host this forum again. I still have memories of 2014 when we hosted the last forum at which I volunteered to be an advocate for statistics. I hope that I have served you well thus far.

Sisters and brothers, given my background in statistics and having worked as a professional statistician for many years before venturing into politics, I have a very keen interest in the development of statistics in Grenada and in the wider Caribbean Community. I have expressed my unwavering commitment and support on numerous occasions to this noble field of work.

My friends, we have come a long way on this journey towards statistical excellence in our region by laying a strong foundation for an effective regional statistical system. Standing here today, I am proud to acknowledge our significant achievements over the past three years at the level of CARICOM Heads of Government.

It has been an honour to serve the people of CARICOM, my statistics family in championing the cause of statistics and ensuring that it was on the agenda of CARICOM Heads for the past three years. I commit to doing all in my power to ensure that the discourse on statistics remains active in future Conferences of CARICOM Heads of Government.

It is unfortunate that statistics development has not been given the attention it deserves in our region. I strongly believe regional economies could have been far more advanced

in terms of sustainable development had we adequately invested in our statistical systems to obtain the data required for more effective decision-making.

There continues to be severe staffing and resource constraints both at the country level and regional statistics level in CARICOM, resulting in our inability to produce sufficient data to inform the development agenda.

We are now at a critical juncture and it is imperative that we take action, both as individual nations and as CARICOM, that will better bolster our development efforts.

One of the proposed actions I have supported in the past was a regional approach to the development of statistics which CARICOM Heads endorsed at the Thirty-Eighth Heads of Government Conference. My colleague Prime Ministers and I unanimously approved the preparation of the Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics as the region's gateway to building resilience and achieving sustainable development through sound data.

In further advancing the agreed upon regional approach, the Strategic Framework of the CARICOM Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics (RSDS) was prepared by the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians and endorsed at the Thirty-Ninth Regular Meeting of the Heads of Government Conference, held in Montego Bay, Jamaica in July 2018.

The CARICOM RSDS is designed to strengthen and improve the availability of statistics for evidence-based, decision-making which is so vitally important for improved development outcomes especially in the context of Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Here, I want to recognise the contributions of the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians, the CARICOM Advisory Group on Statistics and the CARICOM Secretariat for their significant efforts in working together to produce this strategic framework. I commend them for their leadership in moving this process forward as it is of great importance to regional integration.

Sisters and brothers, any strategy designed in this era of development must be specifically aligned to building resilience. Our region continues to be quite vulnerable to the impact of climate change and as we take steps to protect our Caribbean citizens, it follows therefore, that the strategic framework for the RSDS should be similarly anchored on a theme of resilience. At the heart of building resilience is the provision of sound and timely statistics.

To ascertain the population groups at risk in event of natural disasters and other climate-related events; to understand the specific risks, and to design and monitor interventions to reduce their vulnerability, policy-makers require basic indicators on the population, housing in vulnerable areas and persons with disabilities among other issues. In the

absence of such information, the ability of policy-makers to undertake robust climate impact assessments and respond in a timely manner will be significantly compromised.

The devastating impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 have provided irrefutable evidence that there is so much more to be done in building resilient nations. Although a tragedy for those who were severely affected and with whom we empathise, this served as a rude awakening for all of us, illustrating the fact that we need to do better in protecting the lives and livelihood of our people.

Sisters and brothers, here in Grenada, there is already significant alignment with our own policy. Building resilience has become a recurring theme for our national activities as we recognise its importance in enhancing economic and social transformation. Grenada's Medium-Term Strategic Development Agenda 2019 – 2021 further reflects this in its goal to promote resilience in all of its forms (economic, social and environmental) and to accelerate inclusive, job-rich growth, as well as reduce poverty. We look forward to working with our CARICOM sisters and brothers to make resilience and statistics critical cross-cutting themes for national and regional development.

Sisters and brothers, I must emphasise the population and housing census and specifically the 2020 Round which provides a wide range of data and analytical power - critical to the entire national statistical system. All CARICOM governments must support the forthcoming census exercise as a vital component of the CARICOM RSDS implementation.

Fellow statisticians, enormous demands are being placed on you at this time given the new development agenda which includes the sustainable development goals agenda 2030 (SDGs), the SAMOA Pathway, the CSME monitoring framework, the Strategic priorities of National Development Plans. These have all created a culture championing rigorous monitoring and evaluation of outcomes and evidence-based policy making.

Colleagues, at this time, I would like to pledge my firm commitment to the CARICOM RSDS. Further, I will do everything in my capacity as Prime Minister of Grenada and Champion for Statistics in CARICOM, to continue to advance this very important strategy.

The Government of Grenada is in the process of operationalising this RSDS through the modernisation of its National Statistical Office. Fundamental to this process is the transitioning to an independent, semi-autonomous National Statistics Institute. Government's vision is for the Statistical Institute to be highly professional, very responsive to the needs of all users and thus highly and widely respected as the premier source of sound quality official statistics for Grenada.

We have to ensure that the statistics produced by this institute are timely, relevant and accurate and it is produced in accordance with international standards and the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. We strongly believe that this new institute,

with the right structure, the right infrastructure and the right resources will be able to meet the demands of an ever-changing economy.

I must emphasise the importance of standards for statistics which should be at the heart of this national institute and which would be in line with the CARICOM RSDS. Hence, appropriate training and hiring of skilled personnel would be critical to developing the cadre of persons required to produce quality statistics.

Sisters and brothers, at this time, I would like to recognise our Statistics Development Partners who have been making tangible investments in statistics at both the national and regional levels. Given our economic challenges as Small Island Developing States with limited fiscal space, we can only do so much.

Your support has got us to where we are. However, we can go even further with your continued and expanded support. This support would be most effective and sustainable in the context of the implementation of the RSDS through funding of the various activities necessary to make this RSDS operational. It is my understanding that the Implementation Plan and a preliminary costing of the various components have already been developed.

Therefore, I make a clarion call at this time to all development partners local, regional, international as well as our private sector stakeholders who are also key users and beneficiaries of statistics, for greater investment in statistics through the funding of statistical activities and capacity building initiatives. This will also contribute to building a sound national and regional statistical system.

In conclusion my dear sisters and brothers, I would like to re-affirm my commitment to the Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics and to ensure that at the level of CARICOM Heads of Government, there is full commitment in not just pledging support for, but actually investing more to develop this highly important sector.

Sisters and brothers, let us continue to work together in building a resilient region. I thank you.