

**MESSAGE BY H.E. MR. EDWIN W. CARRINGTON,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CARIBBEAN
COMMUNITY (CARICOM) ON THE OCCASION OF
CARIBBEAN STATISTICS DAY, 15 October 2009**

As Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community, it is my pleasure to be involved in the activities marking Caribbean Statistics Day 2009.

The observance of Caribbean Statistics Day follows closely on the heels of another important event recently held in Trinidad and Tobago, the High-Level Advocacy Forum on Statistics. That event and today's commemoration both have the commendable goal of raising the profile of statistics in our Community. The statistics profile in our Region has been quite weak, especially bearing in mind that statistics are really at the very core of almost everything we do.

Caribbean Statistics Day, therefore, provides another opportunity to sound a clarion call for more timely and accurate statistics to help our policymakers, our students, members of academia, the business community and other users to arrive at decisions based on fact. From trade to investments to social issues such as health care and culture, statistics are of critical importance to development, and are particularly crucial to developing states such as ours in the Caribbean.

Indeed, the collection, analysis and dissemination of data are of critical importance in this era of financial and economic challenges and in the establishment, performance and monitoring of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy, our flagship programme.

Regrettably, however, National Statistical Offices faced as they are with increasing demand for data are experiencing high non-response from data providers. This phenomenon is perhaps caused by a general lack of

understanding of why data are being collected and how they will be used to impact the daily operations of the data providers themselves.

It may also be the case that the lack of co-ordination across agencies collecting data leads to burdensome requirements on respondents which contributes to the poor response for information. Put succinctly, in our countries there is a general absence of a statistics culture, while on the other there is an unco-ordinated national statistical system that is largely under-resourced.

It is in the face of these challenges that the Thirty-Third Meeting of the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians held in Barbados in October 2008 decided on the annual observance of Caribbean Statistics Day.

This year, the theme for that observance takes its cue from the High Level Advocacy Forum: ***'Better Statistics for Better Management and Better Development Outcomes'***.

Across the Region, Member States and Associate Members are observing this day with a variety of activities: a testimony to the fact that there is commitment to invest in Statistics as a priority for our development. I am advised that in some countries, activities and events leading to this day began as early as September. Those activities, led by the National Statistics Offices, ranged from poetry competitions, to publication of articles, to video presentations, to seminars panel discussions and displays of reading material.

Another component of our observances today is the use of statistics by the media in educating and informing the population as to the importance of its contribution to good governance as well as to other issues of significance.

As part of our activities to mark Caribbean Statistics Day 2009 here at the Secretariat, we will launch several facilities:

- ❖ Census Online, an online portal for data from previous population and housing censuses developed with support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA);
- ❖ the Help Desk facility which is a learning/knowledge resource of the CARICOM Statistics Sub-programme's website developed with support from the European Commission (EC);
- ❖ TradSys Online, an online searchable Merchandise Trade Database developed with support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)
- ❖ CARICOMInfo, online data dissemination software developed with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and
- ❖ Our new look CARICOM Statistics Website.

These facilities are all geared at improving public access to statistical data.

I am confident that these continuing series of engagements will reverse the current trend and achieve the objectives of:

- ❖ Improving awareness of statistics at the national level and across the Region;
- ❖ Highlighting information on and insights into the process of production of statistics;
- ❖ Promoting the use of statistics in a wide variety of areas;

- ❖ Increasing credibility in the statistics produced;
- ❖ Establishing new partnerships in the development of statistics;
- ❖ Receiving investment resources to reposition and restructure necessary statistical agencies.

In effect therefore, it is my hope that the emphasis on this vital area for assisting development should result not only in greater awareness but also recognition of the role of statistics as a tool for improving the lives of the citizens of our Community.