WELCOME REMARKS BY

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AT THE SECOND HIGH-LEVEL ADVOCACY FORUM ON STATISTICS Radisson Grenada Beach Resort, 26 May, 2014

It is indeed an honour and privilege for me to chair this morning's opening ceremony and to offer very brief welcoming remarks at this very important highlevel forum on statistics.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is with a sense of deep joy that I welcome you to our beautiful shores and more specifically to this very important forum. Why are we really here at this conference? This is very important question for all of us in focusing our discussions over the next couple of days on finding solutions to the significant challenges that we are faced with in the area of statistics. There is no doubt that a lot of work has been done in developing statistics in the region. That said we must not be under any illusions that we are anywhere close to where we should be. We continue to rely heavily on gut feelings, anecdotal evidence or good data that have outlived their usefulness to make important decisions that affect the lives of many of our citizens. Unfortunately, this way of conducting our affairs is not good enough and hence the timeliness and importance of this Forum. The objective of which is to promote commitment to the strategic development of statistics at the highest level of CARICOM to ensure the availability of timely, high quality and relevant statistics for decision making and empowerment of citizens of CARICOM.

We are indeed very happy to have each and every one of you with us today and we feel very confident that the objectives of the Forum will be met and that at the conclusion, we can leave this venue feeling that we would have achieved much during this short period of engagement.

We have an exciting program ahead of us, which importantly will feature a keynote address by our distinguished Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Energy. This opening ceremony will set the stage for a series of engagements over the next couple of days which includes a series of high level panel discussions today followed by a number of meetings and seminars in the coming days.

We hope to conclude the opening ceremony by 10:30 am following which we would have a short break before the commencement of Session 2 – High Level Panel on the Policy Context- Investing in Statistics by Government. The Chair for this session will be Professor Jacob Opadeyi, Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Guyana.

Before introducing the speakers, I would like to acknowledge our partners in this important initiative for their financial and other assistance in making this Forum a reality. The CARICOM Secretariat, the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS 21), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Union (EU) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). And of course, we must not forget our local team from the CSO for the work they have done in collaborating with these organizations to get this forum of the ground.

I thank you