



PRESS RELEASE

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OPENING REMARKS BY DR. PHILOMEN HARRISON

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SECOND HIGH LEVEL ADVOCACY FORUM ON STATISTICS

RADISSON GRENADA BEACH RESORT

GRENADA

26 MAY 2014

On behalf of the Deputy Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Ambassador Manorma Soeknandan, I am happy to deliver these Opening Remarks on the occasion of the Second High Level Advocacy Forum on Statistics.

The opportunity of this Forum has been used to hold a number of meetings and events, including: the Census Symposium, a Regional Statistics Seminar and the Meeting of the CARICOM Advisory Group on Statistics (AGS) which will serve to establish the Caribbean Association of Professional Statisticians (CAPS). There will also be an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Fair on Statistics.

This Forum, which was originally scheduled for 2013 during the observance of the International Year of Statistics (Statistics2013), is taking place at a time when on-going and upcoming globally significant events are having an impact on our Community. These include: the global economic and financial crisis; the Rio +20 Sustainable Development Conference, out of which the goal of eradicating poverty was identified; the approaching timeline of 2015 for the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals; the Small Island Development States (SIDS) Conference in Samoa later this year, that will focus the world's attention on countries such as ours, that grapple with unique and particular vulnerabilities; and the negotiations for the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

To drive solutions in all these matters, the importance of data cannot be underestimated and indeed has been recognised. In the case of the Post 2015 era, the United Nations High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons' report has called for "...a data revolution for sustainable development, with a new international initiative to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens." Our discussions and activities here this week are therefore quite relevant to the global agenda and our Community's place in it.

I must thank the Government and people of Grenada and acknowledge the hard work of the Central Statistical Office of Grenada led by Mr. Halim Brizan in hosting these events, and extending that renowned Grenadian hospitality to us all. I especially want to thank, Dr. the Rt. Honourable Keith C. Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada, for taking time to be here and to deliver the keynote address. Prime Minister, We look forward to you championing the cause of statistics and statisticians at the highest level of the Community with the same verve and vigour that you have infused into leading the Community in the area of Information and Communication Technology!

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are heartened by the response of our International Development Partners to the requirements of the Community to develop its statistical capacity. Their involvement in this Advocacy Forum is just one avenue in which they have lent support. The European Union has provided support under the Ninth and Tenth European Development Fund tranches for Statistics including in the areas of Trade in Goods and Services, National Accounts, ICT, Environment, Social/Gender and the 2010 Census Round.

PARIS21 has enabled training on National Strategies for the Development of Statistics in the Region with many countries commencing initiatives in this area and the organisation is a key supporter of today's event.

The Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB), along with the OECS Secretariat work in particular in the Eastern Caribbean countries.

The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) has supported a number of initiatives including the conduct of Poverty Assessments and Demographic Analysis training and has also extended support to this week's events,

The Inter-American Development Bank's (IDB) support includes Merchandise Trade Statistics, the Regional Statistics Work Programme, the production of a Draft Model Statistics Bill, the 2010 Census and the development of a Common Literacy Framework.

The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) has supported the 2010 Census Round including data processing and Mapping/GIS. The Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) of Canada has partnered in a number of initiatives including Census data Analysis trade in services statistics and fellowship training to Directors of Statistical Offices of the Region.

The UN System and specialised agencies; the World Bank and the IMF through its Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre (CARTAC), the USAID, the Government of Mexico, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Caribbean Tourism Organisation, have also engaged with us in the development of a number of areas in Social/Gender, Environment and Economic Statistics.

This support of the IDPs and the Regional organisations has engendered much success and the challenge now is to sustain the process of strengthening capacity for which core support from countries is a major requirement. In this regard, some countries have begun the process of modernising their statistical systems and we are featuring them during the course of today's agenda.

Therefore, as we move forward with this forum, we need to give voice to the data revolution in the CARICOM context. Within the CARICOM Secretariat we have an Office, Regional Statistics, completely dedicated to the compiling and dissemination of data for and from the CARICOM Member States and Associate Members. Without such data, countries and the Region cannot plan policy and forecast our future whether in economic, social or financial sectors. Statistics is a basic cross-cutting factor and involves all levels of policy.

The contribution to the development of statistics to the Region by past directors of statistics must be recognised as well as that of the current crop of Directors. The Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians (SCCS) continues to be a resilient force and a number of useful mechanisms have been developed by the Advisory Group on Statistics (AGS). We welcome the establishment of the Caribbean Association of Professional Statisticians which is expected to be formalised during these series of meetings. The experience and expertise of these groups and individuals and their willingness to contribute to the development of their profession must be lauded.

Data are all around us – notably - Big Data is now with us, data that are generally collected by huge corporations or by Credit Card companies, through online shopping and in the use of social networks and which are all likely to impact official Statistics. In this regard it was articulated in the Harvard Business Review, 2012 that the “sexy job over the next 10 years will be statisticians...” The New York Times of May 18, 2014 also put it succinctly -“...Words take a back seat to spreadsheets and metrics as more aspects of life become quantifiable and apps track even our moods. It looks as if the nerds have won. The score is Statisticians 10, Poets 0 ...”

It is imperative therefore, that we find mechanisms that can take us forward such as identifying Best Practices and Centres of Excellence in Statistics across the Region; developing South-South assistance; engaging with schools/universities on the teaching of mathematics and statistics, and the modernisation of statistical agencies. Obtaining core support for the modernisation and reinforcement of the national statistical systems and infrastructure from the governments of the Region would enable the availability of timely statistics to satisfy the needs of users all for the improvement of the lives of our citizens. In these days of economic and financial challenges that we face- we need evidence –official statistics to light the path, to map the way forward - or all our policies will be in vain.

In closing, I must also express appreciation to the staff of the funding organisations, the staff of the CARICOM Secretariat and, once again, the staff of the CSO Grenada, and all those who have worked behind the scenes to make these meetings possible. May their hard work and the investment by our Regional and International partners lay the platform for a successful week and an elevation of the value of statistics in the Caribbean Community!

I Thank You.