



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

ST. AUGUSTINE, TRINIDAD & TOBAGO, WEST INDIES

OFFICE OF THE CAMPUS PRINCIPAL

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National Consultation on Earthquake Safety in Trinidad and Tobago

ALJGSB, UWI - Harry Neel and Charles Massy Room

Mt. Hope, Trinidad and Tobago

Monday July 05th 2010 9am

Salutations

- Thank you Chair, Dr. Richard Robertson, Director of the UWI Seismic Research Centre
- Mr. Joseph Howard, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs
- Colonel George Robinson, CEO in the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management
- Representatives of public and private sector agencies
- Members of staff of the UWI St. Augustine Campus
- Specially invited guests
- Members of the Media

Good morning.

- It is indeed my pleasure as Campus Principal to formally welcome you to this morning's opening ceremony of the "National Consultation on Earthquake Safety in Trinidad and Tobago". This consultation has been made possible through a fruitful collaboration between the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management and the Seismic Research Centre of The University of the West Indies. I am a strong advocate for building synergies among partner institutions and maximizing our partnerships to achieve greater results.
- As such, let me begin by recognizing and congratulating the Chief Executive Officer at the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management, Mr. Colonel George Robinson and the Director of the UWI, Seismic Research Centre, Dr. Richard Robertson for this initiative, and may I add – this is a collaboration that is both extremely relevant and timely.
- Let me also take this opportunity to commend the entire team at the UWI Seismic Research Centre, for their dedicated service to the UWI and to Trinidad and Tobago and the region. It is well known that the Seismic Research Centre plays a fundamental role in monitoring the seismic and volcanic activity in the region. For this, Trinidad and Tobago and our Caribbean neighbours are indeed grateful. Our location makes us susceptible to earthquakes and as such the

work of the Seismic Research Centre and this national consultation, in particular, is extremely important to increasing public awareness on measures for enhancing earthquake safety. We have provided this morning a forum for bringing together key stakeholders involved in earthquake safety, including researchers and practitioners, to thoroughly assess the existing status of earthquake preparedness in Trinidad and Tobago, and to strengthen partnerships.

- In the area of earthquake risk reduction, the UWI recently made a significant contribution with the preparation of new seismic hazard maps for the Eastern Caribbean. I am advised that this is the most comprehensive study of seismic hazards in the Eastern Caribbean, which has been undertaken. This was done in collaboration with the European Centre for Training and Research in Earthquake Engineering (EUCENTRE), and I must say as Campus Principal, it is with great pride that I extend heartfelt congratulations to you all on such accomplishments.
- As many of you may know, I have always been a strong advocate for policy-oriented research, and therefore, I strongly believe that our University, with its concentration of knowledge, expertise and talent must inform society on the

pathways to progress. Additionally, given the challenging financial environment in which our university operates, I have been stressing the importance of rationalizing our Campus research priorities to support applied research that is relevant and impacting on our national and regional development agenda and ultimately, on the lives of the people in our communities. The presentations and discussions that will take place today and tomorrow will be guided by the exciting and impacting research conducted by the UWI and other specialists in related fields.

- Distinguished guests, the issue of earthquake hazards continues to attract regional and international attention, particularly in the wake of the recent devastating earthquakes in the region - most notably in Haiti and Chile. The conceptualization of this national consultancy on earthquake safety therefore also underscores the attention being paid by monitoring agencies to seismic hazards in the Eastern Caribbean. The Seismic Research Centre continues to demonstrate a proactive approach by emphasizing that mitigation measures are the most effective mechanisms in order to reduce our vulnerability to the devastating impact of future earthquakes. Measures such as the application of building codes and effective land use policies are most effective when taken into account at the planning and design stages of projects.

- As an engineer myself, I believe that, the UWI is also well placed not only to ensure the transfer of knowledge in the area of earthquake-resistant design - as the Faculty of Engineering is responsible for training a large number of the region's engineers - but also to encourage the cross-fertilization of ideas between the various specialists from different regions. Knowledge and skills development by tertiary level as well as technical and vocational institutions therefore will serve to create as more robust and sustainable foundation for training builders and contractors in the construction of more resilient buildings.
- This proactive and engaging approach is indeed commendable in order to reduce the potential impact of large earthquakes on our physical infrastructure and human life. Thus, the development of a comprehensive national strategy is absolutely essential as we seek to better coordinate our approaches and our responses. We do need a strong commitment and a concerted effort by all to establish practices and behaviours that support earthquake safety in Trinidad and Tobago.
- It is in this context that I am proud that The University of the West Indies continues to lead the effort towards a collective response to the challenges of our region. In fact, this was the thinking behind the creation of the Disaster

Risk Reduction Centre in 2006 to mobilize human resource capacity within the University and provide assistance to countries in the region both before and after natural disasters.

- Distinguished guests, today's "National Consultation on Earthquake Safety in Trinidad and Tobago" is an important step as we seek to enhance our capacity for disaster mitigation. For the holistic development of our country and our region and for the benefit and well being of our people, we do need to work consistently at reducing our vulnerability to natural hazards. We must draw upon important lessons from our past experiences as we continue to work towards building the kind of future we envision. Science, technology, research and innovation will play a central role in this process and must guide us to new measures and new applications that ultimately improve the lives of people.
- As we celebrate our 50th anniversary, The UWI St. Augustine Campus will continue to work with all stakeholders to build strong public-private partnerships in the service of national and regional development. I wish you a successful national consultation and look forward with anticipation to hearing about the presentations, discussions and outcomes of this two-day forum.
- Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.