

CDEMA

**TSUNAMI AND OTHER COASTAL HAZARDS WARNING SYSTEM
(TCHWS)
PROJECT**

National Tsunami Protocol Adaptation and Testing Workshop

OPENING REMARKS

Delivered by:

Colonel Rodney Smart

Interim Chief Executive Officer

Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management

Venue: Cascadia Hotel and Conference Centre, St. Ann's, Trinidad W.I.

Date: Monday March 21, 2011

Thank you Mr. Noel!

- **Dr. Virginia Clerveaux, Senior Programme Officer, Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA)**
- **Ms. Hannah Bleby, First Secretary- Development, Australian High Commission**
- **Mr. Arturo Lopez Portillo Contreras, Consultant, Tsunami and Other Coastal Hazards Warning Systems Project (TCHWS)**
- **Employees of the ODPM**
- **Workshop Participants**
- **Members of the Media**

Good morning to all!

On behalf of the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management and by extension, the Ministry of National Security, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this National Tsunami Protocol Adaptation and Testing Workshop which forms part of the Tsunami and other Coastal Hazards Warning System Project also called the TCHWS Project. As some of you may be aware, this TCHWS Project is two-fold; there was the public awareness and education aspect which was conducted in 2010 and included the production of materials for

teachers and students, Print and electronic Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and Tsunami Warning signs which have been installed at some of the nation's beaches. This phase of the project, in which you will be involved over the next two days, is the finalization of the National Tsunami Warning Protocol. In both cases, the ODPM anxiously embraced the opportunity to partner with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency because we believe that this project will redound to the benefit of our citizenry and further assist us as we build a culture of safety and resilience in our twin island Republic.

You and your umbrella organizations have all been identified as important stakeholders whom we believe can positively contribute to developing the National Tsunami Protocol and associated Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for our unique twin island Republic. As such, it is hoped that through discourse and our collaborative effort, this workshop will facilitate productive and rewarding outcomes as we adopt a comprehensive approach to Tsunamis and other coastal hazards.

One area of particular interest in this workshop is the enhancement of the mechanisms for notification and dissemination of warning information on tsunamis and other coastal hazards in Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, we cannot underscore the importance of adequate and effective early warning systems for tsunamis.

Almost two weeks ago, one of the world's most disaster prone and disaster resilient countries experienced a 9.0 magnitude earthquake – the fifth largest ever

recorded. This earthquake which is considered 700 times worse than the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, struck off the coast of Sendai, Japan at approximately 2:46 in the afternoon on Friday 11th March. Within less than an hour's time, a wall of water measuring approximately 30 feet high, washed over large sections of the Japanese coastline. Indeed, in the subsequent 24 hours other smaller tsunamis continued to periodically impact Japan's northeast coast, other areas of the Pacific and even as far as the west coast of the United States

Consequently, this massive earthquake and its associated aftershocks, coupled with the resultant tsunamis, have been responsible for the loss of thousands of lives and billions of dollars in damages. Our sympathies and prayers go out to all the families who may have lost loved ones during this tragedy. However, we must remain cognizant of the fact that the situation could have been a lot graver. Experts speculate that the effective early warning systems in place in Japan may have been responsible for successfully saving the lives of millions. Timely and accurate Tsunami warnings issued by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre, highlighted the threat in the Pacific Ocean from Japan to the US West coast and prompted activation of a suite of established evacuation and mitigation procedures in several countries that ensured that the scale of loss was not as severe as it had the potential to be.

You see, living in such an earthquake prone area, the average Japanese is taught from an early age that earthquakes are a “part of life”. As such they have continually sought to engender in their public a culture geared towards disaster risk reduction and management which includes the key element of preparedness. They have actively educated their citizens on the measures that must be adopted to safeguard themselves, their property, their families and their communities, in the event of earthquakes and tsunamis. Additionally they have made concerted efforts to design, implement and execute effective tsunami early warning and response mechanisms which, as we have seen, can substantially abate losses in the event of a disaster.

In Trinidad and Tobago, we are seeking to emulate the approach of our Asian counterparts. We are aiming to develop a similar culture geared towards Comprehensive Disaster Management. Being a small island developing state, located in a region of very high seismic activity, it is indeed imperative that we achieve this. This workshop, for which you are gathered, focuses on one of the many types of hazards that have the potential to impact Trinidad and Tobago – tsunamis. Although the occurrence of these may be rare, its impact will be considerable as a number of geographical factors predispose us to any likely event in the Caribbean region. Additionally, the degree of and our dependence on

development in the coastal zones, increase our nation's vulnerability. Consequently, the tsunami hazard is a threat that we cannot afford to marginalise. It cannot be stressed enough, the necessity and importance of the discussions and learnings that will take place over the next two days.

Throughout today and tomorrow, under the guidance of the very experienced and well travelled Disaster Management Consultant –Arturo Lopez-Portillo Contreras and Dr Clerveaux of CDEMA, it is hoped that all workshop objectives will be achieved. To commence, you, the national stakeholders, will be introduced to the tsunami protocol development process. After this groundwork is laid, the workshop will then get more interactive as we seek to elicit your opinions on the *Draft National Tsunami Protocol and Standard Operating Procedures* with a view to enhancing this policy. Then, in what promises to be an enlightening exercise, we will get a chance to test this enhanced Draft National Tsunami Protocol and Standard Operating Procedures to further identify any remaining gaps. At the end of it all, we at the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management and CDEMA, have full confidence that great strides will be made in increasing Trinidad and Tobago's capacity to prepare for and treat with the threat of tsunamis and other coastal hazards.

Esteemed stakeholders, this two day session is expected to be dynamic and very interactive. Therefore I ask you to ensure open dialogue takes place so that when you leave here tomorrow, all ideas, doubts and issues will be highlighted, discussed and thoroughly considered. Here, you participants are not only representing your particular organizations but by extension your input is being made on behalf of the 1.3 million persons that reside within Trinidad and Tobago. As such, I trust that you recognise the importance of your fully committed participation as it would no doubt benefit the wider national community.

Before I close this morning, let me thank you for your time, your positive energy, your knowledge and your patience in seeing this policy, become a proper and apt document. It is my sincere desire that after this informative workshop you will have an increased understanding of the tsunami protocol development process and that an enhanced and thorough Draft National Tsunami Protocol and Standard Operating Procedures will be forthcoming. Indeed, Comprehensive Disaster Management necessitates it, but more importantly sustainable development in Trinidad and Tobago depends on it.

Have an enjoyable workshop!

Thank you