



ADDRESS

by

Senator the Honourable Brigadier (Ret'd)
John Sandy

Minister of National Security

at the

**FORMAL OPENING OF THE WORKSHOP IN DISASTER RISK
MANAGEMENT FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS**

Place: Rudrunath Capildeo, Learning Resource Centre, Mc Bean, Couva

Date: Tuesday 12th October 2010

Time: 9:00 am

- The Honourable Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, Minister of Education and M.P. for Caroni East
- Colonel Rodney Smart, Chief Executive Officer (Ag.), Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management
- Mr. Maurice Suite, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education
- Ms. Gaynelle Holdip, Curriculum Director (Ag.), Ministry of Education
- Heads of Partnering Agencies
- Heads of Divisions of the Ministry of National Security
- Heads of Divisions of the Ministry of Education
- Representatives of the ODPM
- Facilitators of this morning's Disaster Risk Management Programme
- Programme Participants
- Other Distinguished Guests
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to be here with you this morning as we launch the ODPM's Disaster Risk Management Programme for Primary School Teachers.

Let me first acknowledge that tomorrow, October 13th the world will be observing the International Day for Disaster Reduction. In commemoration of this day, the United Nations is calling on its partners worldwide to play a more active role to protect its cities against disasters.

It is appropriate therefore, as stakeholders in our own local disaster management programme that we not only recognise this day, but also place this workshop; the theme of which is: "***Building a Culture of Safety and Resilience***" within the wider celebrations of October 13th 2010.

At a recent Ministerial meeting held in New York, Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary-General, called on Ministers to lead the way in championing disaster risk reduction as a core element of climate change adaptation.

He urged Governments around the world, to give high priority to implementing disaster risk reduction measures, in order to achieve the goals set out by the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015).

To reiterate his call, he affirmed that, "***we must not delay. If we are too slow to adapt to climate change, we risk making disasters even more catastrophic than they need to be. We must draw on the Hyogo Framework for Action and disaster risk reduction knowledge to protect the world's most vulnerable populations against climate change.***"

Ladies and Gentlemen, we must recognize that climate change is one of the defining phenomena of our era. Natural hazards remain a perennial concern because disaster impacts and losses continue to rise globally, affecting millions of people around the world.

What has become disturbingly prevalent to us here in the Caribbean, is the increase in hydro-meteorological hazards over the past two decades. These hazards have been so severe and horrendous that they have become “disasters” in the true sense of the word.

In September 2004, with the passing of Hurricane Ivan, we in the Caribbean witnessed disruption of lives and destruction of property of many of our brothers and sisters in neighbouring islands, especially in Grenada. More recently, we have seen the severity of earthquakes on Chile and Haiti and the impact of flooding on Kingston, Jamaica.

Trinidad and Tobago as well has had its own experiences with natural disasters. In 1933, a storm adversely affected several areas in South Trinidad, and in 1963, Hurricane Flora did not spare Tobago. Over the years, and in particular the years 2009 and 2010, we have seen extensive flooding and accompanying landslides which resulted in great financial losses, dislocation of persons, damages to homes, places of businesses and infrastructure and even in one case, death.

Countries have been devastated; human lives have been lost; natural resources have been exhausted and, in the midst of it all, the question which puzzles the minds of our global leaders is, ***"How do we minimize as much as possible the loss of human and material capital?"***.

These events, along with many others occurring not just here in the region, but throughout the world, have brought to the fore, the fact that much more work needs to be done in preparing for disasters and minimising its impact. In Trinidad and Tobago, we have been relatively fortunate when it comes to disasters. However, our society cannot afford to simply sit back and **await** divine intervention. We **must** do our part and be prepared.

These issues have served to highlight the need, and with good reason, for better disaster risk reduction policies enhanced by appropriate education and training to help us to adapt to climate change. In this regard I commend the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management.

The UN General Assembly also recognized that Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have unique and particular vulnerabilities. The SIDS continue to struggle against the effects of these hazards, some of which are increasing in intensity, as well as

with the effects of climate change, which impedes progress towards sustainable development.

The General Assembly reaffirmed its commitment to take urgent and concrete action to address these vulnerabilities through the full and effective implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

Our Ministry and by extension our Government remains encouraged by these initiatives coming out of the United Nations' plans and objectives.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, your Government recognises the need to ensure an integrated approach to disaster risk reduction and management and as such we have been working along side the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management, to create a more streamlined and integrated approach to disaster relief efforts and disaster risk reduction education.

The ODPM has been working assiduously towards the creation and implementation of plans and policies that outline how disaster management is to be integrated into the wider Government policy.

It has identified as some of its critical areas of focus: i) working with communities and empowering the citizens to be better able to prepare and respond to emergencies ii) integrating disaster management/ disaster risk reduction in development planning and iii) **sensitising and educating the children on disaster management issues.**

This latter issue of targeting the nation's children is of great importance to your Government. You may recall that the ODPM held a National Disaster Management Quiz for Primary Schools earlier this year.

We must always remember that children are our future; therefore we must ensure that their needs and issues are addressed when programmes and policies are being developed. As a consequence, the ODPM, as one of its areas of focus will in the year ahead engage the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science Technology and Tertiary Education on the formal integration of disaster management into the school curriculum.

The ODPM in adhering to the guidelines established in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, will continue to use Priority 3 of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, which outlines the *"Use of knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels"*; and (2) schools are the best venues for forging durable collective values; therefore they are suitable for building a culture of prevention and disaster resilience.

As stated by the UN/ISDR Director, ***“Making disaster risk reduction part of national primary and secondary school curricula fosters awareness and better understanding of the immediate environment in which children and their families live and work.”***

The results achieved during this campaign would not be overlooked. They would be the “seeds” without which no harvest can be expected. As such, they need to be nurtured, reinforced and sustained, as building a culture of prevention and disaster resilience in schools and through schools is paramount if we are to initiate action and build such a culture in our societies.

The importance of education in promoting and enabling Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) has already been identified by researchers and policy makers.

Accordingly, there is a renewed focus on disaster risk education in primary and secondary schools all over the world. Mainstreaming DRR into school curricula aims at raising awareness and providing a better understanding of disaster management for children, teachers and communities.

There is increasing evidence that students of all ages can actively study and participate in school safety measures, and also work with teachers and other adults in the community towards minimizing risk before, during and after disaster events.

Provide adequate teacher development in disaster risk education, will ensure that Government can effectively reach out to communities and protect them through focusing on education in schools.

School-oriented disaster reduction initiatives may be more relevant qualitatively than quantitatively. As another signal to be sent to the community at large is “if children can do it, then everyone including parents can do it.

This seminar is therefore seen as an important step, particularly since it includes the creation of “Disaster Awareness and Preparedness Training Kits,” which will be distributed to our nation’s primary schools. These training kits will include lesson plans and a teacher’s manual, as well as other pertinent items for the students.

As Minister of National Security with direct oversight for disaster reduction efforts through the ODPM, I wholeheartedly support this initiative and those of this nature to be presented in the near future. We must each take the responsibility to prepare our selves, our families, and our homes to withstand the impacts of hazards, natural as well as man made.

Disaster risk reduction must continue to be a major factor in all our lives particularly as we recognize the changing weather patterns and dynamics. Permit me therefore to reiterate Government's commitment to creating appropriate strategies to minimise the harsh impacts of all hazards on our landscape.

Let us as citizens and stakeholders, re-commit ourselves, as we celebrate International Day for Disaster Reduction tomorrow, to renewing our efforts to a safer Trinidad and Tobago. And Do continue to affirm that GOD is a Trinidadian as words are powerful tools of reinforcement.

I sincerely hope that he continues to sustain us and guide us in the deliberations during this workshop, to redound to the benefit and safety of the People of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you for your attention.