

**OPENING REMARKS
DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME – 12.10.2010**

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ODPM

***BUILDING A CULTURE OF SAFETY AND
RESILIENCE:
DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT
PROGRAMME
FOR
PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS***

**RUDRANATH CAPILDEO
LEARNING RESOURCE CENTRE
MC BEAN, COUVA**

TUESDAY OCTOBER 12, 2010

9:00 A.M.

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- **Thank you Mr. Noel**
- Senator the Honourable Brigadier (Ret'd) John Sandy,
Minister of National Security
- The Honourable Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, Minister of
Education and M.P. for Caroni East
- Heads of Division of the Ministry of National Security
- Heads of Division of the Ministry of Education
- Ms. Gaynelle Holdip, Ag Director of Curriculum
Development, Ministry of Education
- Ms. Chantal Braithwaite, Training and Education Specialist,
ODPM
- Heads of Facilitating Agencies
- Employees of the ODPM
- Facilitators of this morning's Disaster Risk Management
Programme
- Programme Participants
- Specially Invited Guests
- Members of the Media

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Good morning!

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you this morning to the first *Disaster Risk Management Programme* for Primary School Teachers. As you are aware, this workshop is aimed at enhancing the knowledge of teachers at the primary school level on the hazards that most affect Trinidad and Tobago. It also outlines the correct practices to adopt before, during and after these hazards occur so that you can keep yourself and the nation's students safe in the event of a hazard or disaster. This project, which falls under the preparation and prevention elements of the comprehensive disaster management cycle, is one of the many ongoing initiatives that the ODPM is undertaking in order to create a safer and more resilient Trinidad and Tobago. Concurrently, the ODPM is also undertaking projects in the other three elements of the cycle – mitigation, response and recovery. The timing of this programme for teachers is pertinent as tomorrow, Wednesday 13th October 2010, the United Nations Organisation celebrates *International Day for Disaster Reduction*. This day is important for us because it advocates creating a global culture of natural disaster reduction, including prevention mitigation and alertness.

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Without a doubt, the year 2010 can be considered a year marred by a number of major and memorable hazard impacts globally. These hazard impacts ranged from earthquakes to tsunamis to flooding and mudslides and they have killed approximately 450 000 persons. More specifically, if we reflect on the earthquake of January 12, 2010 in Haiti which claimed the lives of approximately 300 000 persons, left 300 000 persons injured and 1,000,000 persons without fixed abodes, we then have a clearer picture of the horrendous effects of a disaster on a population. The earthquake in Indonesia and the subsequent Tsunami that it caused in 2004, is another example of the catastrophic effects that disasters can have on a country or region.

As a member of the mission dispatched to Grenada in the wake of Hurricane Ivan in 2004, I know first hand the adverse consequences of natural disasters. More specifically, in Grenada after Hurricane Ivan, the general sentiments which were echoed were “We never thought we’ll be hit by a hurricane!” and “we never took preparedness seriously.” Being hit by Hurricane Ivan was a very harsh and sobering reality for a number of the citizens of that island who even to this day, are still psychologically recovering from the impact.

In Trinidad and Tobago, it’s sad to admit that we have adopted an attitude that “God is a Trini”, and consequently,

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very little attention or focus is placed on preparedness or safety. Since we in Trinidad and Tobago have often seen weather patterns veer away from our twin islands and sometimes even passing between both islands without much impact, we are even more convinced that while God may be a citizen of many countries, he was definitely born in Trinidad and Tobago. This is a notion that we at the ODPM are seeking to dispel, slowly but surely. Whatever the nationality of the Creator, we, as a society need to begin taking our safety and the safety of our country, seriously. I believe that this programme being launched this morning will assist us greatly in these efforts as children spend approximately eight (8) hours per day at school, in the presence of you, their teachers. By adopting a “Train the Trainer” approach, our primary school teachers will be able to impart the knowledge learnt over these next two days, to their colleagues and then to the students, who can then pass this knowledge on to their families and neighbours in their communities. We must never underestimate the power and intelligence of the school children of the 21st century.

I am sure many of you may recall the story of Tilly Smith, an eleven-year-old British schoolgirl, who was on holiday in Thailand with her family when the tsunami struck in December 2004. Tilly remembered the tsunami warning

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signs that she was taught by her Geography teacher and consequently was able to warn her parents of the impending tsunami. This alarm that was raised by Tilly, led to hotel guests being rapidly evacuated from the beach and dozens of lives being spared. Tilly's story highlights the critical role that you, the teachers play in preventing the tragic impacts of natural disasters.

Over the next two days, the participants in this programme will be exposed to geological hazards, hydro-meteorological hazard, pandemics, bio-terrorism, fires, chemical hazards as well as health and safety practices for the schools. While some may perceive these topics as being heavy, there will also be a presentation from *Culture House Company Limited* on creative and novel ways to teach the information received today using drama and art. I am sure that the facilitators will ensure that no one feels sleepy and that everyone remains enthusiastic, and at the end of the session, more knowledgeable than they were, when they first entered the doors of the Learning Resource Centre.

In the upcoming months, the ODPM will continue with a number of initiatives such as its public education and community outreach programmes which include interactive sessions with the private sector, community groups and educational institutions.

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We have always affirmed that disaster preparedness and disaster risk management are the responsibilities of every individual, not solely the Government or the ODPM. It is for this reason that we must ensure that citizens are provided with the necessary tools to make effective, safe and wise decisions. We each play an important role in the process and by empowering ourselves and building resilience; we are more likely to preserve the well being of our charges, families, our communities, and our country. I know the popular adage says that “it takes a village to raise a child” but I will like to put my own twist on it, “it takes a child to teach and empower a village.” However, this child will only be able to teach and empower this village, if and when the information shared with you over the next two days, is shared.

Before I close, I will like to recognise our first responder agencies which work in close collaboration with us in the management of hazards, crises and emergencies in order to prevent these hazards from becoming disasters. Additionally, I will also like to recognize and thank the Ministers for taking the time from their schedules to participate in this formal launch.

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The ODPM is committed to adopting comprehensive disaster management and creating a culture of safety and resilience in Trinidad and Tobago, and so I implore you to assist us and let's make it happen.

Thank you once again for attending this launch and participating in this workshop and I wish you a safe, productive and beneficial two day session.

Good morning!