

Welcome Remarks
Stein Hansen, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP Barbados and the OECS
4th May 2011

ARUBA

The Hon Michiel Eman, Prime Minister of Aruba

Mr Neil Smith, Regional Authorising Officer and Financial Secretary of the Virgin Islands and R3I Project Board Chair

Ms Maria Dijkhoff-Pita, TAO of Aruba and R3I Project Board Deputy Chair

Caribbean disaster managers, national stakeholders, consultants

Welcome

UNDP Barbados and the OECS is pleased to convene this activity in Aruba under the Regional Risk Reduction Initiative (R3I). In this respect, I bring the regards of the UNDP Resident Representative, Ms Michelle Gyles-McDonnough, who shares her commitment and enthusiasm for this initiative

Let me simply express my personal attachment to this programme, which is at the heart of UNDP's mandate of reducing vulnerabilities through sustainable human development. This project approaches disaster risk reduction first and foremost by developing national capacities. These tools and skills will be used for better risk assessment, hazard forecasting, warning, planning, response and recovery, with the overall aim of minimising losses. It is designed to address the unique needs of each OCT based on the specific hazards they face.

This meeting and related activities are another step in the implementation of the UNDP led and European Union funded R3I project. Several significant activities have commenced or like this one are commencing in the other OCTs, including Anguilla, St Maarten and the Virgin Islands. This week will see the national entities involved in land use planning, disaster preparedness and response, and others being introduced to the approach that will be used to develop the collective capacities of these institutions and the scope of this work. Local stakeholders will also have the opportunity to convey their country's needs and expectations with regard to risk information. This will begin the process that will continue into next year for Aruba and the other OCTs.

Based on the priorities articulated by representatives from Aruba, R3I seeks to strengthen this country's capacity to effectively manage public preparation for and response to hazards through systematic education and training. To achieve this, the work we launch today will include the application of geographical information systems for logistical planning, coordination of emergency management operations, and hazard mapping. We also initiate the development of multi-hazard risk maps as well as assessment of the structural vulnerability of Aruba's critical infrastructure. I would also add that the identification of public warning zones will contribute to the implementation of an all hazards early warning system pilot in Aruba.

In addition to the elements I have outlined, you may also be aware that the R3I and the NOAA National Weather Service (NWS) are delivering training on the use of the Emergency Managers Weather Information Network (EMWIN) just next door. This system receives satellite transmissions of warning messages about hydrometeorological and tsunami hazards to allow response teams to prepare the population for possible impacts.

Further to the technical components that I have described, partnership building and stakeholder commitment are at the heart of this initiative and indeed will, in my opinion, be central to the overall success that we expect and of which we are already seeing evidence. That commitment has been seen in the direct involvement of territorial representatives in the planning and implementation of the initiative. I also

wish to acknowledge the political commitment demonstrated through the presence of the Hon Michiel Eman, and for which we express our gratitude. Let me also state that this commitment in Aruba has also been matched in the Virgin Islands, St Maarten and Anguilla in prior meetings, and as such the OCTs are indicating in every measure the significance of this project. There has been a clear and deliberate emphasis on partnership development with countries and institutions in the Caribbean region as well as globally to access relevant technical expertise. This strategy has the additional benefit of strengthening the bonds of cooperation between the OCTs and other Caribbean countries to share the wealth of their experiences for the betterment of the whole. For instance, this week we have with us colleagues from the UNESCO IOC supported ICG Caribe to share lessons from the Japan tsunami experience and the Caribe Wave exercise in March. Experts from the University of Puerto Rico will visit with local teams some of the areas prone to coastal and inland flooding in Aruba. It is through such collaboration that we can optimise the use of individual resources and add greater value to the work being done across the region.

Before concluding, I must express our gratitude to the European Union for financing the R3I at the level of €4.9 million. While they are not represented at this meeting, I can tell you they are very committed to this activity and eager to see our results.

UNDP also greatly appreciates the efforts of the Director of the Crisis Management Office, Mr Jaime Donata, who has been a proactive and committed partner in the R3I, and for the support from the office of the TAO, Ms Maria Dijkhoff-Pita.

In conclusion I urge participants to perpetuate a culture of continuous learning within their work environments, not only individually, but as organisations, to build the tools and expertise within the country, to remain in the country, to be able to support processes that reduce the vulnerabilities of your populations. I wish you a productive week.

Thank you.