



**Message from Jeremy Collymore, Executive Director
of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency on the occasion of the
International Day for Disaster Reduction
Wednesday, October 14, 2009**

The focus of this year's International Day for Disaster Reduction is *Hospitals Safe from Disasters*. Today Wednesday October 14, 2009 is dedicated to highlighting the importance of strengthening the capacity and resilience of health facilities and health systems against the impact of disasters.

Health systems inclusive of equipment, medical data and personnel need to remain functional at all times. Yet, experience has taught the global community that health facilities and the services that they offer are often severely impacted when disaster strikes.

The Caribbean Community is not exempt from these realities. We live in one of the most hazard prone areas in the world. The diversity of hazard threats, the frequency of their devastating impact and the repeated losses experienced by our families, communities and economies are well known. In the wake of the passage of Hurricane Ivan in Grenada in 2004, there was significant impact to the major public hospitals, health centers and other health care institutions. More than this, Ivan also destroyed approximately eighty- nine per cent (89%) of the housing stock and damaged as many as seventy-seven schools and other educational facilities. Total damage to the education sector and health sector in Grenada was in the range of EC\$196 million dollars and EC\$11 million dollars respectively.

The challenge for the Caribbean is therefore the need for sustained vigilance in addressing the vulnerability associated with living in this region. We have not been deterred by this challenge. Many efforts have been initiated by regional and national bodies with the support of development partners, to address the issue of building disaster resilient facilities and infrastructure that support all sectors in the Caribbean.

One such key initiative has been the enhancement of building codes and standards for hazards other than hurricanes through a Project financed by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and implemented by the Caribbean Organization for Quality and Standards (CROSQ).

With regard to the health sector, the Hospital Safety Index, a checklist for assessing hospital preparedness developed recently by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), has been applied to facilities in the Caribbean. Determining the Hospital Safety Index is a new way of managing risk in the health sector.

Moreover, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) has developed tools such as the manual "Maintenance as a Mitigation Tool" which provides guidance on a well operated system of maintenance for educational facilities.

Also significant is the region's thrust on training and education. A safer building program targeting small builders and artisans has been embraced by four regional institutions while engineering programs specific to structural design, architecture and other related aspects for the construction of resilient buildings and infrastructure are under consideration by the University of the West Indies (UWI).

These are welcome interventions but by themselves will not change the potential devastation than can occur as a result of disasters. We must recognize that resilience is more than physical integrity of critical facilities. It also has much to do with the systems and protocols we put in place. More investment must be made in institutionalizing the processes and mechanisms that sustain critical facilities.

As we move forward and consider the consequences of climate variability and change, a revisit of national development planning frameworks will become increasingly critical and urgent. The development of national resilience policies therefore is no longer desirable; it is essential.

Further, the integration of the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) agenda into national and sectoral plans in CDEMA's eighteen Participating States will contribute to the alleviation of the effects of climate change and disasters and the enhancement of regional sustainable development.

As we commemorate the 2009 International Day for Disaster Reduction, CDEMA takes this opportunity to urge all sectors of society and each and every individual to think about the measures they need to take to keep "safe from disasters".