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**Remarks of the CDEMA Executive Director at the Opening Ceremony of the 5th Meeting
of the Technical Advisory Committee
Radisson Aquatic, Barbados
April 24-25, 2014**

Honorable Minister Adriel Braithwaite, Minister of Home Affairs and representative of the CDEMA Council of Ministers, Head of National Institutions, Delegates of the Technical Advisory Committee of CDEMA, I am pleased to welcome you to this our fifth meeting. Your attendance and participation is of great import to the CDEMA Governance process furthermore this forum provides an opportunity to contribute to the important decisions that are made regarding the work of the Agency and the Regional Programming.

As we prepare to engage in robust discussion over the next few days I wish to spend a few moments highlight some of the key areas that will be characterizing a transformational process for CDEMA and its Member States and which have emerged over the past year.

First I wish to reflect on the Christmas rains in 2013 in the Eastern Caribbean. This event tested national readiness and coordination capacities as well as the regional response support mechanism in some respect and highlighted some key issues that will require our focused attention.

As you may recall, between the 23rd to 25th of December, 2013 a small low level trough moved into the Eastern Caribbean under the influence of a mid to upper level trough. This resulted in heavy shower activity which resulting in flooding, slope failures and infrastructure scouring and failure in Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Saint Lucia. The National Emergency Operations Centers in Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Dominica were activated to coordinate their emergency response operations. Damage and Needs Assessment (DANA) Teams were deployed and preliminary impact assessment and immediate needs identified. The CDEMA Coordinating Unit initiated the Regional Coordination Plan and activated elements of the Regional Response Mechanism to provide the operational and logistic support needed to the three impacted states.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of our National Disaster Coordinators, as well as our regional and international CDM partners for the quick support in providing response support to this event. More importantly I wish to recognize the tremendous spirit of solidarity and support provided by the Governments of the Region.

In terms of lessons learned, this event has highlighted two key areas of concern:

1. The Development and Disaster Nexus **and**
2. The need for greater attention to risk communication

Both require extensive reflection that the allotted time does not provide so I will zero in on the issue of Risk Communication. Some have argued that there was not adequate notification of the impending adverse weather provided by the meteorological offices. Findings have indicated that the Met offices did indicate that there was a trough. I think the real issue is how that information would have been interpreted by the general public and the need for communication of potential risks associated with early warning. Obviously these notifications would also have been overshadowed by the festivities of the season. We need also to give consideration to the significant impacts of a meteorological event occurring outside of the hurricane season and our ongoing state of preparedness. As citizens living in a very hazard prone part of the world, more and more we are observing that traditional weather events are resulting in untraditional outcomes.

We must be prepared to adjust our traditional responses to effectively deal with the new risk realities we are facing.

This leads me to my second point which is related to the issue of regional readiness for the earthquake and tsunami hazards. The January 2010 earthquake that affected Haiti brought the realities of that hazard close to home for us in the region. There is also no paucity of international examples to make us cognizant of the risk. In February of this year, we felt the effects of an earthquake here in Barbados.

Without a doubt, we have improved our efforts to raise the awareness and enhance the preparedness of the populations of our region for this hazard. There is a need to strengthen relationships with our regional partners specializing in this hazard, particularly the Seismic Research Centre of the University of the West Indies. We also need to forge stronger relationships with our international partners with expertise in this area. The CDEMA CU is currently in an advanced stage of discussions with the Government of Chile for the provision of technical assistance in strengthening the region's capacity for addressing the earthquake and tsunami hazards.

My third point, Colleagues, relates to our efforts of the CDEMA CU to strengthen our organizational accountability and demonstration of tangible results. These efforts are driven by our internal recognition of existing deficits in this area, as well as the calls of our development partners who have continued to demonstrate their commitment to this process of CDM Implementation. With financial support of the CDM HIP, and technical assistance provided by IDEA International, we have begun the process of strengthening our capacity for monitoring, evaluation and reporting through training of a cadre of individuals from the CU, Regional Institutions and the National Disaster Offices, as well as setting up of an MER system. This is the first step in facilitating the appropriate capturing of data to monitor and evaluate the results of the implementation of the CDM Strategy. The broader engagement of IDEA will also see a strengthening of Monitoring of the organizations Strategic Plans as well as the Staff Accountability Mechanisms tied to these Strategic Instruments.

This process will be continued under the 10th EDF Intra-ACP Cooperation Strategy (2008-2013) focusing on disaster mitigation and resilience building. 20 Million Euros has been granted to the region for the strengthening of the capacity of national disaster offices and the CDEMA Coordinating Unit for implementation of Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM); the building of national, local and regional resilience through strengthening of warning, national risk profiling and community-based Disaster Risk Reduction; and the strengthening of resilience in key sectors. Of this 4.7 M will be channelled through the CDEMA CU through a grant which will be signed during the month of May. This grant will support the sustaining and advancement of a number of initiatives started under the CDM HIP, namely the Country Development Fund; the support to the technical capacity of the National Disaster Offices; the MER capacity of the Agency as well as strengthening of the Regional Response Mechanism and the Regional Coordination Centre. A key focus of the grant to CDEMA will also be the strengthening of the procurement, financial management and accounting capacity of the CU to internationally accepted standards.



We have also made an initial submission to the CARIFORUM Secretariat for priorities of the Agency for inclusion in a regional proposal to the 11th EDF.

With respect to the strengthening of the Agency, it would be remiss of me not to mention and express gratitude for the support provided by the United States Southern Command (US SOUTHCOM) for their commitment of 4.5M USD for the construction of CDEMA's Training Facility, Regional Coordination Centre and Warehouse which will also house the offices of the Agency's headquarters. The purpose-built facilities will occupy just over thirteen thousand square feet and will significantly enhance CDEMA's capabilities for emergency planning and response, as well as contribute to the growth of the regional skills base for disaster risk management. The work is anticipated to be completed by the end of the first quarter of 2015.

As is our custom, this annual meeting will provide us with an opportunity to review and discuss the achievements and challenges of the Agency over the past year.

Key among these will be the review of the work advanced by the CDEMA Coordinating Unit, particularly with respect to the support provided to the advancement of national level CDM implementation under the CDM HIP. As we are all likely aware, this programme comes to a close at the end of this year outside of the formal evaluation process which will commence in July/August this is an opportune time to give reflection to some of its outcomes and to what is required to sustain and advance these. Specifically, we will give consideration to the model National Disaster Office structures; the technical capacity support provided by the RTST; the Market Research Study undertaken for CDEMA services; and the Regional Response Doctrine.

We will also give consideration to the work of the subcommittees of the TAC and their effectiveness and reflect on how these may need to be refashioned to provide the most appropriate support to this body.

Other key discussions will focus on the finalization of the CDM Strategy 2014 to 2024 which was launched in December 2013, and of its associated Implementation Plan which will provide the guidance for the roll out of the Strategy over the next 10 years.

Of course, we will also take a look at the key emergency events that affected our states over the last year, the lessons we have learned and how these will influence our preparations for the upcoming year.

Finally, we will hear from our regional technical partner institutions on some emerging areas for our reflection and feedback.

Colleagues, I want to thank you for your continued commitment and support to the Coordinating Unit and the shared goal of building a safer and more resilient Caribbean. What is important is that we continue to reflect on the goal and whether we are taking the most effective approaches in getting there. We must be willing to refashion and refocus wherever we find this necessary in order to stay relevant.

I invite you to give your fullest participation to this process over the next two days and wish us all a safe and productive meeting.

Mr. Ronald Jackson
Executive Director
CDEMA

