

One of the more highly anticipated sessions of the 6th Caribbean Conference on Comprehensive Disaster Management took place this morning at the Hyatt Regency Trinidad. This session, which was moderated by Andrew Johnson of the Government Information Services Limited, featured a dynamic presentation by Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General on Disaster Risk Reduction and remarks from Dr. Simon Young, Chief Executive Officer of the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Fund; Honourable Adriel Brathwaite, Attorney General and Minister of Home Affairs, Barbados; Honourable Mark Brown, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Cook Islands; Honourable Collin Partap, Minister in the Ministry of National Security; and Jeremy Collymore, Executive Director of CDEMA. Also included in this session was the ceremonial signing of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction's Making Cities Resilient Declaration between the United Nations and representatives from the Governments of Haiti and Dominica.

In her feature presentation, Margareta Wahlström stressed the importance of risk reduction and public education. She noted that more resources should be placed on mitigation and preparedness in order to minimise the cost of response and recovery. Furthermore, she supported the attempts of governments to decentralise responsibilities such as disaster management, but noted that governments cannot decentralise without providing adequate resources to the lower levels.

Honourable Adriel Brathwaite then affirmed that “the only way to get the missing voices in disaster risk reduction on board is by making disaster risk reduction a part of the political process.” Additionally, he advised attendees and disaster management professionals that we “need to ensure that we take public awareness and education strategies to a different level in order to move the agenda forward.” The Honourable Mark Brown reminded all attendees that “Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation are development issues which cannot be viewed separately from economic, social and cultural issues.” He also advised all disaster management professionals and policy-makers that “we must embark on strategies to inform and guide planning and implementation.”

In addressing the role of CDM in changing the characters of the risk management landscape, Jeremy Collymore indicated that “to deepen and accelerate change with regard to disaster risk reduction, the voices of policy makers must be part of the dialogue.” Dr. Simon Young of CCRIF affirmed that “we, as a region, are making progress in effectively achieving disaster management but we have to continue to ensure that there are resources dedicated to disaster risk management and climate change adaptation.”

Representing Trinidad and Tobago, the Honourable Collin Partap, affirmed that the Government “appreciates the need for a profound comprehensive disaster management policy for Trinidad and Tobago.” To address this gap, Minister Partap assured the participants that the “Government will lay the Critical Facilities Protection Policy and Comprehensive Disaster Management Policy in Cabinet shortly....Government remains committed to the implementation of the Comprehensive Disaster Management.”

The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM), as co-host of this conference, remains committed to working with regional agencies in order continue advancing comprehensive disaster management in the region. In addition to this commitment, the ODPM places the strengthening of policies, plans and institutions high on its agenda in order to create a safe and resilient Trinidad and Tobago.