



# PRESS RELEASE

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**Keynote Address**

**by Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith C. Mitchell**

**Prime Minister of Grenada**

**At the Second High Level Advocacy Forum on Statistics**

**Monday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

**Radisson Grenada Grand Beach Resort**

**Grenada**

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I am delighted to warmly welcome everyone to the Isle of Spice and especially to this important Forum.

This High Level Forum, made possible by your presence today, signifies the importance of the role of statistics and its further development for the advancement of our people.

As a person trained in this field myself, I do feel a heightened sense of responsibility to ensure that we raise the bar of this important variable in the advancement of our region.

I have been informed that the main objective of the Forum is to enable high-level commitment by governments of CARICOM to the strengthening of the national statistical systems as a key means of sustaining the development and availability of timely, high-quality and relevant statistics for decision-making, and for the empowerment of citizens of our entire region.

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I wish to acknowledge the efforts of the CARICOM Secretariat in initiating this Forum which provides an excellent opportunity for high level government officials to grasp a fuller understanding of the state of statistical development in our Region and consider how our collective action can overcome some of the key challenges currently being experienced.

The efforts of the Central Statistical Office of Grenada led by Mr. Halim Brizan, and the CARICOM Secretariat, led by Dr. Philomen Harrison, to organise this Forum ought to be highly commended.

The theme selected for this Forum is *“A data revolution for sustainable development, with a new international initiative to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens”*.

Having reflected on this theme, I wish to offer a few key messages.

First, Statistics ought to be seen as the voice of our people Development is about empowering our citizens, whether it is through education and skills development or health care. It is also through statistics that we inform about their reality and results of actions taken by the people or by government.

Statistics is not only important for policy-makers but also for providing information to the Citizens of our Region. Our citizens require appropriate statistics to hold their governments and all serious stakeholders, accountable.

Therefore, the role of statistics in development is not only for our governments to monitor, but also to drive the development outcomes that statistics measure through the voices of the people of our region.

We are all faced with tremendous and quite similar challenges in our respective countries: low and slow economic growth, high rates of unemployment, high national debt, fiscal imbalances, relatively high levels of poverty and unemployment, high import bill—just to name a few. It is therefore difficult to address these challenges effectively if we cannot measure their magnitudes accurately.

Moreover, we must effectively track our progress toward our Millennium Development Goals.

This is exactly what statistics enable us to do.

We are at a time in our Region's history when talk shows have become a dominant medium for public information and many times, misinformation, often generating more heat than light.

It is said that *“There are two kinds of statistics, the kind you look up and the kind you make up”*.

I am afraid there is too much “making up” of statistics on talk shows around our Region. We must change that. Given this reality, we must develop and timely disseminate information products which our citizens can consume, and in the process become more enlightened and empowered to play their specific role in nation building.

#### Second, statistical development requires a regional approach

Sisters and brothers, at time of unprecedented economic challenges with very limited and stretched public resources, and dwindling grant resources, the necessity for evidence-based policy-making is crucial. Every development dollar must count. None must be wasted. Governments and citizens alike need relevant and timely information on which to make decisions.

It is clear, even with the best intentions, that national statistical systems are currently not meeting these challenges. Consequently, we must invest in regional approaches that help to optimise our scarce public resources.

In our Region, the free movement of people—and of minds—has to be encouraged and entrenched in the sharing of best practices as we confront the enormous challenges we face. Statistical development should not be static or isolated within individual countries because the development of statistics is essential to regional and national advancement. For this reason, this High Level Forum is important and must help us with the roadmap for the statistical development in our Region.

I repeat: the acceleration of statistical development requires a regional approach.

I am pleased that part of the focus of this meeting is to ensure that the Regional Statistical Work Programme is aligned with the strategic objectives currently being pursued by countries. I want to encourage you to continue along this path as this approach will allow us to build on each other's strengths, and tap into the regional support and guidance needed for successful execution of our strategies.

My third key message is that our data revolution must be powered by ICT.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we chart the way forward for statistics through the design of our various Strategies for development, I want to impress on all of us the potency of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in helping us to move forward quickly and effectively.

To create the data revolution that we desire, ICT must be the engine. As Lead Head of Government on ICT in the CARICOM Quasi Cabinet, I am heartened to see that part of this week's activity is devoted to the application of ICT in statistics. This is certainly in keeping with CARICOM's broad goal of developing a Single CARICOM ICT Space to enhance the environment for investment and production.

I believe therefore, that ICT has great potential in transforming our national and regional Statistical Systems to inform solutions to the majority of our data challenges. Technology has the potential of significantly cutting costs and reducing the time taken to collect and produce solid data, thus enhancing efficiency. Hence in these challenging times, ICT and Statistics cannot be isolated from each other.

I wish to underscore that our data revolution must be powered by Information Communication technologies.

My dear brothers and sisters, I would like to encourage us to continue thinking of creative and innovative ways to revolutionize our statistical processes through the use of ICT in our national and regional strategic plans.

#### The future of statistics in the Region

Sisters and brothers, we are at a defining moment in our Region. I have been told that this week we will witness the first meeting of the CARICOM Association of Professional Statisticians (CAPS). This is a welcomed development. Indeed, we must professionalise the statistical services in our countries. Young bright students must see an exciting career path in statistics and information and be attracted to pursue careers in this area. I believe the Association can send that signal as provide a valuable network for statisticians and researchers to develop their craft and maximise their development impact.

I see a bright future for statistics in the Region. I am confident that we can achieve the

objective of the work programme through the commitment, hard work, sacrifice and continued collaboration of all stakeholders.

I therefore take this opportunity to assure you that the Government of Grenada is highly committed to supporting the National Statistical System and the work of the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians in the efforts to ensure that there is an increased capacity in providing accurate, timely and reliable data for all.

#### Our development partners

Before I conclude I wish to acknowledge the contributions of our development partners who have helped tremendously in the statistical development in our Region.

The hosting of this meeting bears testament to the support of our development partners like the CARICOM Secretariat, European Union (EU), PARIS21 (Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century), CDB and UNDP. I also want to recognise the continuous support of the other organisations (the World Bank, the IMF working through CARTAC, the ECCB, OECS Secretariat, ILO, Statistics Canada, CIDA, the IDB, UNFPA, UNECLAC, UNICEF, UNSD, UNESCO, PAHO UNWOMEN, UWI and all other organisation) who have made, and are making significant contribution in the shaping of the statistical infrastructure in the Region.

In conclusion, I want to wish you a successful meeting today and a productive week ahead. I do hope that the knowledge gained and the sharing of best practices and experiences in these meetings help us become greater advocates for statistics in our respective countries, and will generate ideas to guide the development of regional statistics in producing quality data that meet the demands and are to the benefits of all users.

Once again, I am extremely happy to have you here in Grenada, and I look forward to being an advocate for the conclusions from this forum, in CARICOM and elsewhere.

I thank you.