

Statement By Hon. Noel Arscott

**Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction of
the Americas 4th Session**

Guayaquil Ecuador 27 May 2014

Salutations

Minister Conejor, SRSG Wahlstrom, Colleague
Ministers, Delegates - Let me first thank the
Government and People of Ecuador for the warm
hospitality extended to my delegation and for its
leadership in the field of disaster risk reduction. This
is reflected in the hosting of this fourth session of the
Regional Platform of the Americas.

Jamaica is also privileged to serve with Ecuador as
representatives from Latin America and the
Caribbean in the Bureau of the PrepCom for the 3rd
World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction,

This meeting in Guayaquil comes at an important juncture, one month before the first Prepcom for the 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk reduction to be held in Sendai Japan in 2015 and will provide important input for this important Global Conference that will set a new agenda for Global Disaster Risk Reduction.

Jamaica places high priority on Disaster Risk Reduction efforts at the National, Regional and international levels, with good reason. Experience has taught us that vulnerability to disasters arising from natural or man made events poses real threats to the society and economy. Damage from disasters has placed significant burden on the national budget and undermined growth and development in the economy. In the last decade we have seen on an average annual losses due to disasters in the amount of 14 billion Jamaican dollars – 2.7% of GDP.

Our experiences have compelled us to develop effective disaster response mechanisms and embrace the effort to place disaster risk reduction and resilience at the centre of policy at all levels local, and national. At the national level, the Office of Disaster Prevention and Emergency Management has sought to apply best practices in the field of disaster management based on the effective involvement of communities, towns, cities and parishes, with multi-stakeholder involvement in all aspects of the disaster management effort.

The Government of Jamaica has moved to focus its disaster agenda on increasing resilience to disasters. We have moved to mainstream Disaster Risk Management at national and parish levels and in key sectors. We have decentralized some responsibilities where it is clear that local mechanisms are most appropriate and effective, we have empowered

Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), undertaken extensive local level training and capacity building, developed and implemented community micro-mitigation projects, mapped hazard prone areas and developed community disaster management and mitigation plans. We are moving to enact modern resilience focused legislation, while strengthening our existing physicals planning framework and processes with a view to promoting compliance with international best practices.

We are using Disaster Risk Management information to build a culture of safety at all levels. In this regard we have sought to establish a sector strategy for DRM. We have taken steps to address the needs of the special needs population and implemented systems to support the disabled community especially through appropriate notification procedures.

We have learned that effective communication is key before during and after a disaster and developed an effective National Emergency telecommunications plan and addressed issues of connectivity to the national public safety system.

We are developing a national search and rescue plan, revising our national shelter welfare plan, and our oil spill plan and chemical response protocols all aimed at ensuring better management of risk and driving resilience.

We are equally concerned at the future challenges and view the long-term effects of climate change on disaster vulnerabilities to be a clear and present danger. We see potential challenges arising from extreme weather events which are on the rise, environmental degradation, concentration of populations in vulnerable areas through urbanization,

continued development in hazard prone areas and threats from health disasters such as pandemics.

We must enhance scientific approaches to risk reduction, apply lessons learned from past disasters and mainstream the prevention and mitigation measures that are indicated. We must deepen the multi-stakeholder approach including enhanced private sector involvement.

While these national measures are crucial they represent but part of the picture. Disasters do not have fixed GPS coordinates; they cross borders with impunity as our experience with hurricanes have shown. This is why we collaborate at the sub regional level with CDEMA and attach such importance to the Regional Platforms from Panama to Guayaquil. We also work very closely with the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) in promoting a robust framework for action in support

of mitigation and adaptation initiatives in relation to climate change.

No country is disaster proof: all are vulnerable but we can act decisively and collectively to reduce our vulnerabilities through prudent measures at the local, national regional and international levels. Jamaica remains committed to playing its part at all levels and in all relevant for a.

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