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Official Statement – Fifth Regional Platform for DRR in the Americas

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago offers our sincerest praise and thanks to the Chairs and the host, the Government of Canada for organising and facilitating this engagement with the countries of the Americas.

Trinidad and Tobago reaffirms its commitment to the regional and international community of our resolve to contribute to the achievement of the outcome and goals of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015 – 2030).

As a rapidly developing small island, Trinidad and Tobago - like the rest of the region is presented with inherent vulnerabilities. We have noted the unprecedented effects of climate variability and change on our island states. This is also coupled with the high earthquake risk within our region. Although we have been spared the wrath of hydrometeorological events such as Tomas (2010), Sandy (2012), Erika (2015), and Matthew (2016), we are ever mindful of the impact especially in relation to loss of lives, destruction of the physical and natural environment and the immense developmental setbacks which have crippled some of our neighboring small island Caribbean states over the last decade.

We have continued to focus our efforts towards reducing vulnerability and building resilience at all levels through the adoption of a people-centred, whole of government and whole of country approach.

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We view the integration of disaster risk reduction and management strategies into development planning as pivotal towards our country's quest to achieving our sustainable development goals by 2030.

In so doing, our Government has embarked on a number of key initiatives that are intended to strengthen our national capacities to reduce risk and build community resilience to disasters.

Emphasis is being placed on the development of a *Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (DRR) for Trinidad and Tobago* which is intended to harmonise, integrate and streamline the efforts of all DRR and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) actors within Public Sector, Private Sector and Civil Society towards preventing and reducing disaster risks, enhancing our capacities and coordination mechanisms and strengthening the resilience of our communities to manage risks.

The Government is also focused on *reducing the risk of disasters especially to those sections of the population who are most vulnerable due to poverty and a general lack of resources*. Our resilience-building programmes are intended to stimulate the concept of preparedness and mitigation and to reduce dependency on the State for survival in the first 72 hours following a hazard impact. Heightened emphasis will be placed on the Community Organised and Ready for Emergencies (**CORE**) programme which embraces a comprehensive approach towards raising awareness on disaster risk reduction through disaster preparedness education across all sectors, whilst concomitantly building resilience across Trinidad and Tobago's communities, including special needs population.

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Another key component of this Government's policy towards promoting an integrated and resilient whole-of-government approach to disaster risk reduction and management is *sustainable engagement and partnerships between State Agencies and the private sector, NGO's communities and volunteers involved in disaster management.*

Our Government is working to strengthen its partnerships among all its stakeholders from the; public sector, private sector, business sector and civil society, as well as among its regional and international affiliates by formalizing and leveraging the National Disaster Risk Reduction (NDRR) platform as the vehicle for DRR mainstreaming across all sectors. These efforts will be reflected in the development and implementation of a National Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) work programme that will seek to synergize the efforts of both regional and international DRR frameworks taking into account all other complementary strategies.

Trinidad and Tobago's National Disaster Office – The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management - has satisfactorily achieved 60% of its set targets based on its Strategic Plan. Significant strides have been made in developing partnerships with the business sector and civil society. Engagements in these sectors have increased by an average of 80% from 2010 to 2016.

We have identified the need to strengthen data collection practices, analysis, and monitoring and reporting mechanisms, especially for high frequency localized hazard events which can be as impactful as a country-wide disaster. We have taken note of the cumulative impact that these high frequency localised events can have, by disrupting livelihoods, and consequently impeding economic growth and development within affected

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communities. In this regard, we are working to create viable solutions to treat with such events so as to improve resilience and minimize all negative impact on our people.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I conclude, allow me to reiterate that Trinidad and Tobago acknowledges the importance of creating a hemisphere that is more resilient to disasters. To this end, Trinidad and Tobago stands in solidarity with all other member states, partners and stakeholders towards working together to reduce disaster risks and build resilience in the Americas.