



**ADDRESS**

**By**

**MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY**

**MAJOR GENERAL (Ret'd)  
THE HONOURABLE EDMUND DILLON**

**ON THE OCCASION OF**

**THE RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY**

**FOR THE**

**OFFICE OF DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND MANAGEMENT  
NATIONAL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE**

**Date: Monday 15 August 2016**

**Venue: NEOC, Pineapple Drive, Mausica**

**Time: 2:00 p.m.**

A very good afternoon to all of you.

It is with pleasure that I bring greetings today on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as we celebrate the visible beginning of a new milestone in strengthening Trinidad and Tobago's Disaster Management Framework and Operations, with the implementation of the Ministry of National Security's National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC).

At this juncture, I must acknowledge the partnership between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of the United States of America to strengthen this country's National Security architecture. In fact, the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) through the Embassy of the United States in Trinidad and Tobago assisted with funding in the sum of US\$600,000.00 for the construction of this National Emergency Operations Centre. On behalf of the Government and my Ministry, I must say we are most grateful for your collaboration.

As always, the Ministry of National Security will continue to work to ensure that ongoing regional and international support mechanisms are embraced, so that we can minimize the factors which can lead to natural and man-made disasters.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the saying “prevention is better than cure” is almost gospel in the field of disaster management. None of us wants to think that we could be affected by a disaster, but preparedness is imperative when it comes to saving lives and property, and even preserving the social and economic stability of a country.

Ladies and Gentlemen, if we take a brief look at world statistics for the period 2006-2016, we will see that natural disasters have affected over 2 Billion persons, injured about 2 Million, resulted in just over 756,000 deaths, and left over 18 Million persons homeless.

To bring those figures home, in the Caribbean Region for that same period of ten years, over 11 Million persons have been affected, almost 600,000 injured, over 231,000 fatalities, and over 275,000 persons homeless. The economic impact on the Caribbean by natural disasters was over fifteen and a half Billion US Dollars (US\$15,597,855,000.00).

The magnitude of natural disasters is undeniable and, over the years, prompted a paradigm shift in how we look at disaster preparedness and management not only here in Trinidad and Tobago, but across the region.

Presently, the Mission of the Ministry of National Security is: *"To create an environment which ensures public safety and security through the maintenance of law and order and the commitment of all available resources to the protection of life and property."* To effectively fulfil this Mission - especially in terms of Disaster Risk Management - the Ministry of National Security established the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM) in 2005 as the coordinating and managing body for Disaster Management, especially through the roles of: Prevention, Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery.

In executing its leadership role, the ODPM saw the importance of utilizing a Collaborative Approach when working with communities, local stakeholders and organizations, as well as regional and international partners in order to continuously build Trinidad and Tobago's resilience to disasters.

Ladies and gentlemen, the NEOC is a most welcomed facility as it provides centralized coordination and control of emergency-disaster response and relief operations. Computer systems and an Incident Management System will be used during emergencies to assist in the tracking and management

of emergency situations, thereby creating a much-needed coordinated approach from our first responders.

The newly constructed NEOC is indicative of this Ministry's strong commitment to disaster management. We will continue to promote an integrated and robust Whole-Of-Government Approach to disaster risk management, and contribute to the attainment of sustainable development by strengthening national capacities to reduce risk, and build community resilience to disasters.

The Government has begun to put initiatives in train to:

- ✓ Develop a Disaster Risk Management Policy for Trinidad and Tobago;
- ✓ Reduce the risk of disasters, especially to those sections of the population who are most vulnerable due to poverty and a general lack of resources; and
- ✓ Facilitate greater partnerships between State Agencies and the private sector, NGOs, communities and volunteers in disaster risk management.

Ladies and gentlemen, this drive towards greater disaster management in Trinidad and Tobago will soon be advanced, as the Ministry of National Security prepares to host the Twelfth

Conference of Defense Ministers of the Americas (XII CDMA) from October 10<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup>, 2016 under the theme **“Strengthening Defense and Security Cooperation in the Hemisphere in an Increasingly Volatile Global Environment”**.

The conference will comprise attendees from thirty-four (34) Nation States representing the Americas including the Caribbean, Latin America and the United States of America, who will meet to discuss topics such as confidence and security building measures, peace support operations, civil-military relations, and emerging threats such as transnational organized crime and terrorism.

One of the matters which Trinidad and will be placing on the table for consideration at the Conference is discussion on the development of a **Hemispheric Security and Defense Cooperation Policy for Strengthened Humanitarian Emergency Assistance**. The formulation of a structured cooperative policy will most certainly benefit this country considering the Caribbean’s vulnerability due to its geographical location, giving us the facility to efficiently coordinate resources in the event of a major disaster and strengthen existing practices.

In this context, our National Emergency Operations Centre has a critical role to play in maintaining public safety for our citizens, as well as lending support to our regional neighbours as a hub during natural disasters.

I take this opportunity to once again thank the United States Embassy for partnering with the Ministry of National Security in bringing this facility to fruition.

I encourage all of us to work together to make Trinidad and Tobago a safer and more secure place for us all. Again I compliment the U.S. Government for partnering with us, as no one country can treat with threats alone. Let us go forward with a philosophy of collaboration and cooperation. Only through a collaborative effort can we hope to be better prepared to cope with disasters and become a truly resilient nation.

I thank you.