



Remarks of the Chairman of the CDERA Council, Hon Dale D. Marshall, Q.C., M.P., at the Signing Ceremony of the Agreement between the United States Agency for International Development/Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA)
Tsunami & Coastal Hazards Warning System (TCHWS) Programme
September 26, 2007, CDERA Coordinating Unit

H. E. Mrs. Mary Ourisman, Ambassador of the United States of America. Mr. Jeremy Collymore, Coordinator, CDERA, Mrs. Lucene Wharton-Isaacs, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ms. Judy Thomas, Director, Department of Emergency Management, CDERA Staff

This morning's ceremony is yet another tangible demonstration of the US Government's commitment to the development of the region, and it is fitting since it is supportive of the Comprehensive Disaster Management Framework, which was initially developed with assistance through its Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

It will be heartening to learn that since the development of the framework, all the CDERA Member States have endorsed the principles of Comprehensive Disaster Management which are now being implemented through their national emergency management agencies.

Madam Ambassador, it seems like just a short while ago, that I had the pleasure of signing, with your predecessor, a Memorandum of Understanding between our two governments for the exchange of global seismic monitoring data as part of a new Caribbean Tsunami Early Warning System. In that instance, your government's support provided for the installation, operation and maintenance of seismological equipment at Gun Hill in St. George.

In that context, today's signing of a new grant which seeks to enable coastal communities to prepare for and respond to coastal hazards is another significant milestone.

We have provided the technological infrastructure and we are now providing our people with the knowledge and skills to respond effectively to such dangers. Often, we think of the Caribbean as a region which is only prone to certain types of natural hazards – hurricanes, tropical storms and floods. We tend to forget that there are other natural hazards such as earthquakes and tsunamis which, though less frequent are much greater in magnitude and higher in potential loss of life.

A key component in an effective response to these events is early warning and the ability to react instantaneously once the alert is sounded. The true value, therefore, of a project of this kind is that it provides coastal communities with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the dangers posed by these events and provides new skills which will result in changed behaviors. It is hoped that through these changed behaviors that many lives will be saved.

Over the last twelve years the frequency and intensity of tropical systems and the resulting damage to coastal communities has reinforced the need for a project such as this. Another key area in responding to the aftermath of tsunamis and earthquakes is Search and Rescue, and I am pleased to note that training in this critical area will soon be provided.

Also on the cards, I am told, is the initiation of a tsunami information centre which demonstrates a long term commitment to the principles of this intervention, well beyond the life of the project.

For our part, the Government of Barbados has accepted the Comprehensive Disaster Management framework as the basis for our national emergency management programme. Within that, we are working towards the development of a national mitigation strategy which will raise awareness of this critical element of disaster management.

Experience has shown that mitigation is an effective way of reducing the impact of severe damage caused by natural hazards as it encompasses elements of land use and environmental planning as well as adherence to building codes and standards. The national mitigation strategy will seek to mainstream critical actions and to develop self-sustainability and resilience within communities, thereby reducing the suffering and social dislocation which often accompanies disasters.

The key government agency for taking all of this forward is the new Department of Emergency Management, which came into effect on April 1 this year. This Department has been mandated to spearhead Government's emergency management programme and forge collaborative linkages to achieve this end.

Madam Ambassador, I wish on behalf of CDERA Member States to convey our deepest appreciation to the U.S. Government and to yourself, for your continued support to CDERA and the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I now sign this Memorandum of Understanding and look forward to many more years of solid collaboration.