



Remarks of the USA Ambassador Mary Ourisman 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

The Honorable Dale Marshall - Attorney General and Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Jeremy Collymore – Coordinator for CDERA, special guests, ladies and gentlemen; I am extremely honored this morning on behalf of the Government of the United States to be a part of this signing ceremony to put in place a grant with CDERA.

On December 26, 2004, the world watched and listened with horror to the news following the massive earthquake-generated tsunami that swept over Indonesia, Thailand and many other countries of the Indian Ocean region.

The loss of life was staggering, and the physical destruction was immense and widespread.

Many countries came together to provide life-sustaining relief and rehabilitation support and pledged to help the affected countries put systems in place to keep such an event from causing such death and suffering ever again.

Since then, we have been supporting -- in conjunction with many international agencies and partners -- the development of tsunami warning systems around the world, and most particularly of interest here, in the Caribbean and adjacent regions.

Unfortunately when these events occur it is often the poor and disadvantaged communities which bear the brunt of losses both in human lives as well as material possessions.

The state then has a responsibility to come to the aid of such communities to lend support, to assist in restoring livelihoods, to ensure that children are able to resume their attendance at schools, to prevent the emergence of related diseases, and ultimately to ensure that there is a collective will by these communities to move forward with greater resilience.

It is against this background that I am pleased to be here today to announce an important new initiative as part of the USG's continuing support to assist the region to cope with natural disasters.

This new program which will be implemented through a grant with CDERA, focuses on the region's response capabilities to tsunamis and coastal hazards.

Here I must highlight that the program will be lending significant support to strengthening and empowering coastal communities to respond to such disasters.

The program will be implemented over a 2-year period and is supported by \$475,200 from the US Government, through its Agency for International Development and Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance.

This assistance complements the multi-million dollar USG support for the creation of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System in the wake of the Indian Ocean Tsunami of December 26, 2004. As part of that effort, the USG provided \$37.5 million in related supported to the Caribbean and Atlantic regions including the installation of seismic monitoring stations in islands throughout the region.

The station in Barbados became operational in October, 2006.

This new assistance is a critical link that unites the sizeable investments that the US Government has made in regional seismological and sea-level monitoring, with operational national level warning systems down to the "last mile" of vulnerable coast lines.

As all here present know, this is where the rubber meets the road... the ability to get the warnings that have been generated through a variety of technological applications down to people who need to evacuate vulnerable areas before tsunami waves or storm surges can reach them.

Ladies and gentlemen we are therefore pleased to be continuing our close collaboration with CDERA, with which we have worked closely since its inception over 15 years ago.

We are fortunate to have solid regional experience to draw on for carrying this program, as well as being able to draw on recent international experience from similar activities in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

As I conclude, I want you to know that you have a friend and partner in the US government as you work towards making the region safer.

Thank you.