

Active Caribbean Conference, Opening Ceremony.

6th March, 2009

Greetings from the Healthy Caribbean Coalition

Prof. Trevor A. Hassell.

Thank you very much Christianne....The Honourable Donville Inniss, Minister of Health, Professor Henry Fraser, Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Cave Hill Campus, and, University of the West Indies Dean of Medical Sciences; other members of the head table, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to have been given the opportunity to bring greetings on behalf of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition ... one of the key sponsoring organizations of the conference. The Healthy Caribbean Coalition was formed at the conclusion of the Healthy Caribbean 2008 Civil Society led chronic disease conference held in Barbados in October last year, and is an alliance of Caribbean civil society organizations aimed at combating chronic diseases in the region.

One of the several objectives of the Coalition as expressed in the “Caribbean Civil Society Bridgetown Declaration: Tackling the Caribbean Epidemic of chronic diseases” is to *“promote physical activity through population based actions and policy change”*... so that when the Coalition was invited to be a sponsor of this workshop and conference the invitation was readily accepted since the workshop not only reflects one the major mandates arising out of the Healthy Caribbean 2008 conference but I recall that the early plans for this workshop were made during the Healthy Caribbean 2008 conference and therefore the workshop should be seen as a direct output of the October 2008 conference.

As has been stated on several occasions chronic diseases account for significant ill health and death in the region, they contribute appreciably to reduced productivity and present a major financial burden in all countries of the region. The Healthy Caribbean Coalition which is made up of organizations from 16 Caribbean countries, and represents some 19 disciplines, such as agriculture, education, faith based, trade unions, private sector, youth, health care providers, policy makers, urban planners, media, and CNCND NGOs, was established as a direct result of, and in response to, the Heads of Government of CARICOM Summit on chronic diseases held in Port of Spain, Trinidad in 2007 in which in the preamble of the declaration it was stated *“ we are fully convinced that the burdens of the chronic diseases can be reduced by comprehensive and integrated preventive and control strategies at the individual, family, community, national and regional levels and through collaborative programmes , partnerships and policies supported by governments, private sectors, NGOs and our other social , regional and international partners”* The Coalition has as its broad mandate the continuation of a revolution started at the Healthy Caribbean 2008 civil society chronic disease conference, and has issued a Declaration and produced an Action Plan for tackling the chronic diseases throughout the region; for a revolution in health care and health maintenance is required with the full involvement

of all sectors of Caribbean society if we are to achieve population lifestyle change resulting in slowing or halting of what has been described as the tsunami of chronic diseases. A paradigm shift is needed in Barbados and the Caribbean in which we move from a disease treatment model and approach, to one of good health and wellness, and such a shift needs to be demand driven, that is driven by the people of the region.

And so as I bring greetings from the Healthy Caribbean Coalition and as I compliment the policy makers, health care providers, health NGOs, academia, civil society, and several other organizations, both here in Barbados and throughout the region on their on-going efforts aimed at tackling the chronic diseases, I would like on behalf of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition to encourage political leaders both here in Barbados and throughout the region, as I pointed out on another occasion recently to *“take further major and often challenging policy decisions at the national level to create an enabling environment and put a legal framework in place to facilitate effective combating of chronic diseases”*. Some decisions that the political leadership might consider could include;

1. Earliest enactment of legislation to eliminate smoking in public places, including on the ban on the sale, advertising and promotion of tobacco products to minors, with insistence on effective warning labels on cigarette packages;
2. Articulation of a national policy of population salt reduction aimed at reducing the number of people with uncontrolled high blood pressure,
3. Enactment of Ministerial policy in which only nutritious foods and drinks are sold by concessionaires in public school canteens and on school premises, (so-called soft drinks should not be sold in schools); and
4. Promotion of policies and actions aimed at increasing physical activity in the entire population.

And as I close, I pose three questions on behalf of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, as we seek to continue the health and wellness revolution in the Caribbean, and they are ...

- a. Has the time arrived for us in Barbados and throughout the region for employees to be financially rewarded by employers and companies for pursuing healthy lifestyles?
- b. Should worksite health maintenance programmes be conducted during working hours as a routine health maintenance programme of the companies most valued asset its people?
- c. Should policy be established in which all children attending primary and secondary school be obliged to take part in half an hour of physical activity before school commences?

I hope that these and other challenging issues have and will engage the attention of those attending this Workshop, and I look forward to receiving a report of the outputs of the conference and workshop which I shall share widely with members of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition on our website at www.healthycaribbean.org.