



**Statement by Senator, the Honourable Maxine McClean, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados, on behalf of the Right Honourable Freundel Stuart, Prime Minister of Barbados, on the occasion of the Side Event, 'Childhood Obesity – A Development Time-bomb: Learning from SIDS to Accelerate Multi-sectoral action in support of the 2025 NCDs Targets and the SDGs**

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Prime Minister of Barbados, the Right Honourable Freundel Stuart. The Prime Minister could not be here with us today, but sends his highest regards to all, and best wishes for a successful event.

He would also wish me to express on his behalf, and on behalf of the Government and people of Barbados, deepest sympathies to those, who over the past few months, have been ravaged by one natural disaster or another, be it a tropical storm, hurricane or earthquake. These natural phenomena and their devastating impact remind us again and again of our vulnerability. This point cannot be overemphasized, and it must echo down the halls of every international forum, and resound across the international community. It is a lived reality, especially of Small Island Developing States.

The Prime Minister is keenly aware of the importance of childhood obesity, the broader subject area of non-communicable diseases, NCDs, and the complexities

involved in addressing these issues. As he commented in 2011, in the lead-up to the United Nations High-level meeting on Prevention and Control of NCDs, “it is necessary to move the NCDs response beyond the health sector, since the underlying conditions that influence health are social and economic.”

We are here today, to attempt such a shift, not only beyond the health sector, but also beyond generalities, to specific aspects of the NCDs agenda that challenge us, and threaten our development achievements. We are also here, attempting to move the NCDs agenda and response beyond silos and singular efforts that do not help us to achieve global objectives, many of which we share.

Barbados, as a Small Island Developing State, is part of a collection of similar countries that share unique vulnerabilities. Some of these challenges, include our remoteness from large markets, and our high economic vulnerability to economic and natural shocks, beyond our domestic control. These challenges, whether singular or combined, could easily undermine our full realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and our efforts to ensure that we ***leave no one behind***.

It may be recalled that the overarching theme of the 2014 International Conference on Small Island Developing States, held in Samoa, was “The Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States through genuine and durable partnerships”. The Government of Barbados wholeheartedly supported the general principle of partnership, in 2014, and continues to do so, today. It is against this backdrop that we are pleased to engage with partners, here, on the issue of childhood obesity.

Our efforts go to the core of sustainable development: we, policy-makers, international organisations, civil society and individual philanthropists, are seeking to address an issue now, which has implications for both current and future generations. Barbados, in recent time, has found itself obliged to have a sound understanding of this childhood epidemic, and its social, economic and health impact. We will need the support and partnership of others in this undertaking.

This is a SIDS-wide, emerging and growing phenomenon. SIDS populations, including those found in the Caribbean, feature prominently among the most overweight and obese in the world. Childhood obesity is a major concern, with prevalence rates being between 28 percent and 35 percent, in Caribbean countries. And for Barbados, we know that not dealing with childhood obesity now, presents challenges for the future. Overweight and obesity estimates for adults in Barbados is of the magnitude of 65 percent to 70 percent. Clearly, we must invest in prevention and control of NCDs among our youth, to stem the tide of this national, regional and international crisis.

International studies indicate that there are significant health and economic benefits to be gained from prevention and control interventions and strategies that involve infants, school children and adolescents. Barbados, therefore, supports a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach to childhood obesity, working with others of like mind, to find solutions to this common problem. We, therefore, call on all those responsible, across all sectors, to redouble their efforts, to find solutions at the national level, which can be shared with others.

To support this approach, Barbados has invested in a National Childhood Obesity Action Plan that has been endorsed by the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization; an Inter-Ministerial Committee to champion a national approach to non-communicable diseases; and a National NCDs Commission to coordinate and facilitate NCDs prevention and control strategies. With an estimated 60 percent of our national health care budget going directly and indirectly to prevention, control, management and treatment of non-communicable diseases, translating to 5 to 7 percent of our Gross Domestic Product, a national, cross-sectoral approach to a new and emerging national problem is obviously critical.

The epidemiological transition from malnutrition to over-nutrition and obesity took us only 60 short years. However, the solutions will not be found overnight. No longer are our people dying of malnutrition and related diseases, waterborne diseases, vaccine-preventable diseases, tuberculosis, and even HIV/AIDS. But in some cases, our focus has not changed. What is required is a pronounced and palpable paradigm shift that supports the health and well-being of our current population, and especially the under-18 population segment. Business as usual is no longer a credible option.

The strategies identified for a national program that are endorsed and supported by the Government of Barbados, include having sound breastfeeding policies that embrace baby-friendly hospitals; support for good and quality nutrition, through our national school feeding programme; making exercise and physical activity compulsory in primary, secondary and tertiary care institutions; promoting food labeling as a regional requirement for locally produced and imported foods; and making legislative interventions in relation to the marketing of unhealthy food and

beverages, to children.

Barbados is pleased to share with SIDS its introduction of a Sweetened Beverage Tax, in 2015, as a demand reduction strategy for sugar sweetened beverages; the development of Guidelines for Healthy and Nutritious Food in Schools, in 2016; publishing of the revised edition of the Food Based Dietary Guidelines for Barbados, 2017; and our involvement in a landmark Reversal of Diabetes Trial, through collaboration with Sir Richard Branson and the University of the West Indies.

I must add here that the Port-of-Spain Declaration, which members of CARICOM have agreed to and ratified, provides a roadmap for a regional approach to the non-communicable disease epidemic. It is in alignment with the 2011 Political Declaration of the UN High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of NCDs, which CARICOM countries endorsed. Heads of State and Government of CARICOM, during their July 4 to 6 Summit, in St. Georges, Grenada, this year, took note of the recently concluded 10-year evaluation of the Port-of-Spain Declaration, recognising that in some ways, their countries had fallen behind in the battle against NCDs, and in the fulfillment of their goals.

We must intensify our efforts, especially as we move toward the Third UN High-level Meeting on NCDs, in 2018. The current Chairman of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM, Dr the Right Honourable Keith Mitchell, articulated the commitment of his colleagues in July, stating that “we simply cannot afford to continue the lifestyle and food consumption patterns, which are literally killing us.”

Let me close by drawing attention to a critical aspect of any effort to address NCDs, and childhood obesity. We must examine the scale of potential investments that many SIDS require for sustainable development, even as we grapple with this and other challenges, such as climate change, urbanization and unemployment.

We call on the donor community, international financial institutions and the private sector, to provide technical assistance and funding to help us secure the future of our people.

I thank you.