THE HON. DR. FLORENCE DUPERVAL GUILLAUME

MINISTER OF HEALTH

HAITI

TO THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE

18TH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF PANCAP

SAINT LUCIA

25 APRIL 2012

Hon. Ministers of Government

Distinguished Members of the PANCAP Partnership

Other invited guests

Ladies and gentlemen of the media

As we commence this Eighteenth Ordinary Meeting of the Executive Board in the beautiful island of Saint Lucia, I greet you on behalf of the 65 partners, that comprise the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) established Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV and AIDS (PANCAP).

Indeed, it is a great pleasure to be here. Not only, for the "warmth and beauty of this island", described by some as, a "glistening emerald between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, but also because of the special place in the regional integration process, that Saint Lucia has come to be known for.

As the Caribbean continues its herculean efforts not to be overcome by this epidemic, this country remains close to the PANCAP process. Indeed, successive governments have demonstrated their commitment to this response, since those fledgling days of this Network, when it was still trying to “define” its path, and held its first Annual General Meeting here.

For those of us here today, who were part of those days, I am sure it feels good to be back. The journey has been a mixed one. The, now expanded Partnership, embraces many sectors of the English-, Dutch- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Its frameworks for action, the Caribbean Regional Strategic Frameworks (2002-2006 and 2008 -2012), have over time provided a collective vision, a coordinated mission and, a consolidated action plan for the Partnership.

In summary, a structure for the Partnership has been defined; advocacy interventions have been undertaken to strengthen the human rights agenda for persons living with HIV and AIDS, and most-at-risk populations; clinical and other capacities have been built or strengthen in all countries through training and sensitization of health care workers; the Partnership has mobilized resources for use at both the national and regional levels; commendable progress has been made in the area of access to treatment, through the Partnership’s advocacy for significantly reduced anti-retrovirals, leading to increased availability of medicines. Significant achievements also have been made with programmes to prevent mother-to-child transmission. And, I could go on, but wish to stop and say: the journey has been a mixed one. There is still much work to be done.

The general consensus is that, stigma and discrimination are still widespread. The prevalence of HIV in most at risk populations, such as, Sex Workers and, men who have sex with men, is far greater than in the general population, and HIV investment and programming do not quite reflect this, leading to the question – Has there been the requisite level of value for the money spent?

The call is still being made for strategic information to better characterize the epidemic. In short, there is still room for improved coordination in the Partnership.

And so, I begin my tenure as Chair of the Executive Board fully seized of the challenges at the level of the Partnership and those externally generated. I have no illusion. The uncertainties of the global environment and the gloomy economic prospects as a result, mandate that we strengthen our coordination, and, foster closer integration at all levels.

That is the view of my government.

My President is on record, as acclaiming, the important role that CARICOM has played, in Haiti's rehabilitation process before, and in particular, after its devastation from the January 2010 earthquake. CARICOM has championed the case of Haiti's sovereignty, and, has argued, that the priorities for Haiti's rehabilitation must be determined, and implemented, under the guidance of its leadership. A founding member of this Partnership, UNAIDS, continues to play an important role in the Region's humanitarian response to Haiti, ensuring that the issues related to HIV & AIDS are kept on the front burner, and are not subsumed by the crisis and its aftermath.

These are just a few examples, to demonstrate, that the whole, indeed, is always greater than the sum of its part. The synergy at all levels of the Partnership must be felt.

I am therefore heartened, to see on the agenda of this meeting, that among the important points to be addressed, are efforts, to improve and strengthen coordination, not only between the regional and sub-regional levels of the Partnership as in the case of the OECS grouping and wider network, but also among international partners, working in Civil Society, as is the case of those organisations in the area of stigma and discrimination.

Regional stigma and discrimination programming must be given high priority, if we are going to overcome the barriers, to which I earlier alluded. Improved coordination, among regional and international members , working in this field, has become all, the more critical in light of the impending closure of the PANCAP Discrimination Unit in a few months time.

In this regard, I would like to pause here, to thank and place on the record, the UK Government, through its Department for International Development (DFID), for propelling this Region, to venture into uncharted waters, and, for providing the support to the Partnership, from the early days of the Champions for Change Initiative through its culmination into the PANCAP Regional Stigma and Discrimination Unit. It is our expectation, that in the spirit and renewed effort at improved coordination that the work undertaken, the lessons learnt and the gains made, will be built upon, as this Region goes forward to overcome the hurdles of stigma and discrimination.

It is important that we do so. This is time of scarce resources. Notwithstanding, we expect to achieve results. Our sustainability as a region demand it! Our people deserve no less! We could do it! So, I look forward to the discussions on the sustainability of our national and regional HIV responses, and the inherent key financial and institutional issues, as we seek to redress the challenges to our sustainability and, identify the opportunities for charting the way forward.

I am pleased to see in all of this, that this Partnership still understands fully, that the Caribbean Regional Network of People Living with HIV is still present and being counted. We do look forward to receiving the report of its advocacy agenda, in response to the external challenges, as well as, the opportunities provided as the Partnership's response makes the transition from vertical programming into the new era of integrated programming, A reality! Our agenda over the next few days, is well carved out.

I wish to reiterate my pleasure at being here today and my expectation of a most productive meeting.

Thank you for your attention.