

HAZARD AWARENESS WEEK

Strengthening resilience through legislation, awareness preparation and response at the National, corporate, civic society and community levels.

Fellow Dominicans:

As Minister for National Security, Immigration and Labour with responsibility for Disaster Management, I welcome the opportunity to address you as we recognize HAZARD AWARENESS WEEK for a second consecutive year. You will recall that last year as Minister for Public Utilities Energy and Ports I was privileged to have delivered the inaugural address of the observance of the first ever HAZARD AWARENESS WEEK in Dominica. Hazard Awareness Week as the name implies seeks to raise our consciousness of the very many hazards which confronts us, living as we do, on a rugged volcanic island with mountains which rise to over 4000 feet, located in the Hurricane belt with over 300 inches of rain in the mountainous interior.

Last year's Hazard Week was a tremendous success based on the fact that we had a cross section of entities from the public, private and corporate sectors participating in various activities during the week, with the main focus being on the identification of hazards and the steps one should take in mitigation against the hazards identified less they became disasters. The stakeholders therefore detailed the do's and don'ts as a reinforcement strategy to be taken before and after a disaster. The week of activities was centered on the theme "HAZARDS DO NOT NECESSARILY HAVE TO BECOME DISASTERS".

In recognizing the successes of last year's activity it is my duty to encourage all the stakeholders to build on that success by focusing directly on the individual and at the community level, replicating as it were the successes and best practices identified at the National and corporate levels as we seek to strengthen our Planning, mitigation, preparedness, and response mechanisms as a Nation State.

One school of thought suggests that "where man interfaces with hazards, disasters are likely to occur". Dominica as we all know is a multi-hazard prone State by virtue of having in excess of ten volcanoes, and being susceptible to sea surges, hurricanes, earthquakes, landslides, bushfires, oil spills, traffic accidents and the like.

I therefore want to strongly suggest that this year the focus should be to know your hazards and vulnerabilities and to plan for mitigating such risks through

disaster risk reduction and management. I want to suggest further that the scope of this week's exercise should span not just the one week but the entire year up to the next hazard awareness week as our exposure to hazards is not seasonal but year long.

Hazard week therefore provides the opportunity for the various stakeholders including the Office of Disaster Management (ODM) to bring into focus the fact that natural disasters and manmade disasters are part of our very existence. It also allows us the opportunity to identify and strengthen synergies that exist among stakeholders in the planning, preparation, mitigation, recovery and rehabilitation efforts required in dealing with some of the potential hazards that we are faced with.

In so doing I would like us to focus on consolidating our efforts towards Hazard mapping, disaster preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction. We must begin to see disasters not only as one-off events but as phenomena, triggered by multiple factors, requiring multiple and holistic solutions. Therefore our interventions need to be continuous, deliberate, dynamic and integrated, so that they can guide our development processes and strategies. This HAZARD WEEK therefore provides the foundation and building block in the thrust to achieving that objective.

It is also my desire to see that this week's activities will encourage the full participation and support of the various publics and that the various stakeholders will use the available mediums to continue to sensitize, train, educate, stimulate and document programmes and activities geared at informing the general public on programmes and proactive measure for the spreading of the philosophy of disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction.

At the Government level, we are aware of the positive impacts that such a strategy can have on the general public and we will seek to provide all the support and resources available to us to facilitate pursuit of that strategy.

We are also aware that developments achieved over decades through hard work and sacrifice can be destroyed by disasters in a matter of hours if not minutes as was evident in the recent earthquakes in Haiti and Chile and closer home in the landslide at San Sauveur just two weeks ago.

Unfortunately the reality is that this pattern of major disasters are likely to increase, as the predictions and models and trends suggest that disasters both natural and man –made are likely to be triggered by more frequent extreme

weather events, including climate change, increased seismic and tectonic activity, poor development practices, unplanned urbanization, non-enforcement of building codes, and flawed developmental and environmental protection strategies. Health related issues, the illicit drug trade and human trafficking are also cause for serious concern. The predictions of an above average hurricane season for this year emphasize our vulnerability while ongoing pitch battles in Mexico and Jamaica as a result of the illicit drug and small arms trade and the explosion of that oil rig off Louisiana in the Gulf of Mexico are examples of manmade disasters which confront our region.

In the Dominica context the topography, geographical location and the volcanic formation of the island exposes us to many hazards that can quickly become disasters.

The Office of Disaster Management in collaboration with various ministries and stakeholders including regional and international partners and affiliated agencies such as CDEMA, SRC, and OFDA continue to embark on proactive programmes and activities geared at empowering ministries, stakeholders and communities in the quest of enhancing disaster risk reduction, risk management and disaster preparedness on island.

The response recently in the community of San Sauveur speaks to the fact that the first responders are likely to be persons from the immediate community hence the reason for strengthening disaster committees at the community level and at the level of the people. It is in that regard that I send out the call to all stakeholders including the ODM to join forces to encourage persons to bond together to build community based resilience and to build a strong national focus geared towards disaster risk reduction, as together we will be able to better plan, prepare, mitigate, respond and rehabilitate our families, our communities, our businesses and our nation.

In the coming year therefore the Ministry of National Security, Immigration and Labour through the Office of Disaster Management and with the support of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) will be focusing on the following:

- The enactment of legislation to empower the Office of Disaster Management to carry out its mandate.
- Development of relevant plans and standard operating procedures with a bias towards community base disaster district communities.

- Training in disaster management with a focus on disaster risk reduction, hazard mapping, and the strengthening of the community disaster programmes.
- Initiate a collaborative and integrated approach towards disaster risk reduction and management with all stakeholders
- Initiating the concept of District Disaster Emergency Centres that will compliment the operations of the National Emergency Operating Centre and will empower persons at the community level to better identify and manage in a proactive way the hazards of the area.
- Initiating a strong volunteer network and establish clear auxiliary roles with the ODM and with the National Emergency Planning Organization.

IN CONCLUSION.

- Allow me to reiterate the point that focus must now be placed on disaster risk reduction and preparedness. Best practices suggest that disaster risk reduction pays and is beneficial to all, and therefore needs to be strengthened. There is need to look beyond the HAZARD WEEK and to collectively and in partnership, that is, public/private/civil society and NGO'S, to join forces for implementing future wider risk reduction measures, including mitigation and awareness. The long-term overriding need is for a national strategy for tackling hazard management and disaster risk reduction.
- The focus will therefore have to be at the source, i.e. at the community level, the level on the ground, with people in disaster-affected communities –and to empower people with the knowledge of the hazard before disaster strikes.
- In the weeks and months leading to next year's HAZARD WEEK, I call on the stakeholders and the Dominica citizenry to make a difference at the individual level, at the community level, at the corporate level. It is worth repeating that preparedness should start at the source, where the risks are, where the hazards exist, where the disaster related events are likely to occur each year.

- Many effective risk reduction measures are low-cost, even no-cost. In areas where people have not dreamt yet of insurance schemes awareness, simple mitigation and evacuation training, can be first steps to decreased vulnerability.
- Government stands committed to the cause. One of the opportunities the HAZARD WEEK achieves is that it brings all the stakeholders together on a common ground and for a common purpose and that is to drive home the point of hazard awareness and mitigation. Let us therefore not allow it to be a once a year event rather let us take the momentum forward by forging stronger links across community and national levels and to begin to pool resources in country to deal with emergency matters. This will no doubt increase vitality and relevance of national action and will strengthen our ability to cope with disaster both natural and manmade.

I thank you.

Honourable Charles Savarin
Minister of National Security, Immigration and Labour.
Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica.