

June 5, 2009
Ritz Carlton
Montego Bay

ADDRESS

BY

HON. RUDYARD SPENCER

MINISTER OF HEALTH

TO

MINISTERIAL MEETING ON HIV AND DEVELOPMENT

IN LAC

Salutations

It is an honour to deliver the opening remarks to this Ministerial Meeting on HIV and Development in the Latin America and Caribbean Region. Some of you were also participants at the just concluded COHSOD meeting.

This forum brings together key decision makers from across the Region to assess our progress and our challenges and to define the approach that will move us toward the achievement of the great milestone articulated in the Millennium Development Goals on HIV/AIDS.

I would like to recognize the work of ECLAC and ECOSOC in advancing the Region's agenda for human security. The Region's poor need the sustainable support of institutions that have the reach, influence and capacity to advocate on their behalf and to pursue actions that will keep their hopes and dreams alive.

The world faces grave challenges and an uncertain future. This has implications for this Region and especially for our small developing. ECLAC has projected that the Region will grow by a mere 1.9% at best, after six consecutive years of robust GDP growth averaging nearly 5% per annum.

Foreign Direct Investment is estimated to decline 35-45% while unemployment is expected to increase from 7.5% to between 7.8 and 8.1% this year.

These projections have implications for the social security of the Region, and in particular, our ability to secure sustained interventions in the fight against HIV/AIDS, which is the most devastating health and development challenge faced by modern society.

This group must be bold in charting a course that will make this a Region in Green signaling a great victory in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and a Region free from the shackles of poverty, ill health and inequity.

We must do more than benchmark the best practices and scale up intervention strategies to combat HIV/AIDS.

We will continue to fail our peoples if the social and structural conditions of society remain the same. It is time for a social revolution in this Region that is built on the fundamental principle of human right. It is time to move beyond technical solutions to confront the social determinants of health in this Region.

Long-term success in responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic requires structured and specific progress in human rights, stigma and discrimination and gender inequality.

There is need to strengthen regional and national institutions to assess and act on evidence of gendered impact and to address in a systematic way, the disempowerment of women and their inability to enjoy social freedoms.

We must take action to broaden the policy space to include the poor and marginalized in a way that enhances participatory governance. Regional and national capacities must be strengthened to improve pro-poor policy formulation and implementation.

Today, even as we deliberate, some 55 persons will become infected. Let us not forget them. Let us not forget the 2.5 million who are living with the disease in the Region. Let us not forget those with shattered dreams and no hope.

Ladies and gentlemen, the time is now to lift up our people above the wreck and ruin of ignorance, poverty and disease. What we do here must offer a better hope for sustainable and equitable health outcomes for our peoples.

Thank you.