

**Address by Senator the Honourable Hazel Manning**

**Minister of Local Government**

**at the Meeting of Developers and Agencies  
within the Region of the  
Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation**

**Friday February 29, 2008  
10.00a.m.**

**Ms. Patricia Mejias, Chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation**

**Mrs. Barbara Raymond, Chief Executive Officer, Tunapuna Regional Corporation**

**Members of the Council of Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation**

**Other Councillors of Municipal Corporations**

**Mr. William Benjamin, Consultant**

**Mr. Rodney Ramlogan, Manager, Regional Planning, Ministry of Local Government**

**Other representatives of the Ministry of Local Government**

**Members of the Media**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

**Good Morning.**

It gives me great pleasure to be with you this morning in a session that I would describe as “the meeting of the minds”. I would like to begin by extending gratitude to the Chairman and Council of Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation for inviting me to be a part of this gathering, out of which, I am certain, a number of great initiatives will evolve.

The Ministry of Local Government continues to be guided by its mission, which is to ensure the sustainable development of our local communities through effective policy guidance, facilitation and monitoring of its implementation agencies. We do all of this

within a framework that promotes strategic partnerships, wide participation in government and the continuous development of our human resources.

When I was appointed Minister with the responsibility for Local Government, one of the first items on the agenda was to facilitate a monthly forum whereby we, at the Head Office of the Ministry, can meet and engage all Municipal Leaders – in particular, all mayors, chairpersons and chief executive officers. These sessions have proven to be quite successful in bringing to the fore, the many issues that impact directly on our collective responsibility to bring improved service delivery in our regions. Just two days ago we held such a session which turned out to be as animated, as it was productive.

Operating within the overarching framework of the Vision Twenty/Twenty National Strategic Plan, the Ministry has identified the pillar that speaks to “Promoting Effective Government” as one that informs its current reform drive. To paraphrase the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, we are saying that good governance promotes economic prosperity and social cohesion. It enhances environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources. A greater confidence in government and public administration is also a given. In short, good, effective governance helps to strengthen democracy.

Regardless of whether one is speaking within the context of a public sector or a corporate setting, any discussion on good governance must mention in part:

- Autonomy
- Accountability
- Transparency

- Empowerment and of course, Participation.

At all levels – national, regional and local – we must encourage the involvement of our citizens in decision-making processes, particularly in areas that directly impact upon the quality of their lives and living.

And so the Ministry recognizes that it starts with us...When we invite Council members to sit with us and exchange ideas and information, it ensures participation and ultimately leads to greater buy-in across the board. Likewise, when Council meets and deliberates on the matters of the people, with the people, it redounds to a similar benefit. Publish the dates of your statutory meetings and invite the members of the community to participate. Maybe we can work with you to air the discussions on radio and television.

One of the critical dimensions of Local Government Reform is the decentralization of power. We propose that under this new system, Central Government will be, principally, the policy-making, monitoring and evaluating body. On the other hand, Local Government bodies will be the principal executing arm of the State. Although this arrangement does not apply to some portfolios like national defence, foreign trade and energy, it still embraces the vision of increased citizen participation at the local level in many other spheres – such as maintenance of public buildings, management of waste, implementation of environmental health and beautification, management of disaster preparedness and assistance in the provision of social services to name a few.

In a reformed local government system we are advocating that the practice of participatory governance will be even more pervasive. Greater inclusive strategies at the local level will ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of any proposed developmental

processes. With the broadened mandate of the Municipal Corporations, no one must be left out. At the end of the day, however, the degree of “all-inclusiveness” that local governance achieves, will determine whether or not the reform initiatives are merely cosmetic, or if they truly result in the creation of a fair and equitable society. It would be left up to all of us to make the reform successful.

And so we are talking Local Government Reform within this context. The idea is to place people at the heart of the community development process. BeCAUSE governance is essentially a collaborative enterprise between local bodies and civil society, we envisage vibrant, synergistic partnerships in the not too distant future.

Today, this “meeting of the minds” brings all of you, the key stakeholders together, with a view to involving you in discussions about the direction of growth within this region, and ensuring that a common foundation is laid from the very beginning.

The Ministry recognizes the value in setting standards, establishing bench marks and advocating a structured approach towards the preparation of sustainable regional and local area development plans.

Within the new functional and legal framework for the transformation of the local government system, we will execute our mandate as facilitator and monitor, through our Local Area and Regional Planning and Development Unit. The way forward from a very technical perspective will be addressed in the very comprehensive presentations to be showcased this morning. I am sure that we will pique your interest...and so you will now have an appreciation for the Ministry’s vision and intent and what the entire process entails.

As you make your contributions and continue your discussions, be mindful that above all, your regional planning must be reflective of the needs of the community, AND they must consistently address or redress the major challenges faced by our citizens on a daily basis. Anything less would mean running counter to the overarching goals and objectives of what we seek, ultimately, to accomplish.

Once again, I would like to thank the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation for inviting me to participate in this forum. I look forward to your comments from the floor, and feel certain that as we tap into one another's ideas and concepts, we will add greater meaning and relevance to our overall outputs and contributions.

Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen and may God guide us on this journey of growth and development.