

**Address by the Honourable Anthony Wood,
Minister of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports
on the Occasion of Inaugural Youth Development
Lecture Series at Sherbourne Conference Centre
on September 30, 2006 at 5.30 p.m.**

Mr. Henry Charles, Director, Caribbean Youth Programme (Caribbean Centre); Featured Speaker, Dr. Ivan Henry; Mr. Lionel Weekes, Permanent Secretary, Youth Affairs and Sports; Mr. Richard Carter, Director, Youth Affairs; Staff of the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports; specially invited guests; ladies and gentlemen:

It is my considerable pleasure to welcome you all to this the inaugural lecture in the Youth Development Lecture Series, initially proposed by the Commonwealth Youth Programme and being launched here this evening in Barbados.

Barbados considers it a great honour to have been asked to host this inaugural lecture among the eighteen options available to the Commonwealth Youth Programme in terms of the countries served by the CYP Caribbean Centre. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, we are humbled by the confidence which the Commonwealth Youth Programme obviously reposes not only in our capacity for organization, but more

importantly in our commitment to the issue of youth development.

The Commonwealth Youth Programme has identified as the goal of this youth development lecture series “A paradigm shift in the Youth Development Policy environment”. Having recently attended what is perhaps the most significant policy making forum in the world for youth development – The Commonwealth Youth Ministers’ Meeting – I do not think the CYP could have chosen a more appropriate goal. It was certainly clear at that meeting that the new challenges facing youth development and the new *manifestations* of the traditional challenges require new thinking, innovation and creativity if we are to significantly impact the lives of young people. So Mr. Chairman, while I would never propose that we throw out the baby with the bath water, we certainly have a lot of bath water to throw away.

We have to throw away the old, tired perspective on youth which sees young people as problems to be addressed and we certainly have to throw away the even more tired approaches to youth which sees youth programming as finding things to occupy their time and keep them out of “trouble”. We have to dump the stereotyping of young

people which denies them their individuality and prevents us from seeing their potential for great things and we have to be prepared to accept that our experience, however great it is, does not necessarily make us qualified to speak for young people or to determine the course of their development. We have to throw out the sovereignty of theories and training and experts and embrace the sovereignty of the life experiences of young people today as the only firm basis on which to plan.

Mr. Chairman, while we could never claim to have gotten everything right in Barbados, and while we have made our share of mistakes – one clear operational philosophy has underpinned our approach to youth development from the inception and continues to underpin it today: We develop our programmes on the basis of consultation with young people and our interventions are based on face-to-face engagement and putting a face to what for many young people is a sterile, uncaring bureaucracy called “government”.

The most recent and broadest manifestation of this approach has been the national consultation on the proposal for the establishment of a National Youth Service for Barbados where we have spent the last six months engaging

the young people of Barbados and the general population in helping to design the architecture of the national youth service. In fact, we are very pleased that our featured speaker this evening – Dr. Ivan Henry was one of the consultants who led the process and we look forward to the insights which may have emerged from that process of national consultation which he may share with us this evening.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, we hope that this Youth Development Lecture series will usher in a new period of dynamic thinking and social planning in the area of youth development. Our Caribbean societies need it; our socio-economic development demands it; our young people deserve it.

I thank you.