

**OPENING REMARKS**  
**HON. SAM T. CONDOR, MINISTER OF EDUCATION, YOUTH, ET AL**  
**AT THE**  
**CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING FOR THE**  
**CARIBBEAN REGION**  
**NOVEMBER 18 – 21, 2008**  
**ROYAL ST. KITTS HOTEL**

Today a beautiful picture is being painted. Young people are gathered from across the region engaging in meaningful and important topics of discussions on respect and understanding. As you sit before me eager to affect positive changes in our societies, your ideas are the brushes, your energy and intentions are the colours but unfortunately your canvas is increasing intolerance, xenophobia, intergenerational conflict, escalating crime and violence and a host of other manifestations of social and moral breakdown that is sweeping our region and our world.

I am indeed heartened to address you here this morning and on behalf of the people and Government of St. Kitts and Nevis, allow me to extend a warm welcome to St. Kitts and Nevis and I would add that your discussions over the next couple of days could not have been in better place.

After your long days of intense and productive dialogue, you are a stone's throw away from either great entertainment or opportunities to sit back, relax and have quiet, mellow time, whatever your heart desires. I know it will be easy to get carried away but at this point, I urge you to do your best to fight the nagging urge to soak up the scenery, hospitality and specialties of the island. You are here for a bigger reason. But you are more than welcome to come back at another time!

I had the opportunity to examine the preliminary material that was circulated on this consultative meeting and I must say that you all have mammoth responsibilities ahead of you these next couple days. For example, I note that in addition to a list of specific objectives, you have been generally charged to

- “Create synergies to better address youth potential and youth challenges both at a national, parish and community levels in relation to achievement of the Commonwealth’s respect and understanding agenda”
- “Develop working partnerships and performance indicators by which to implement youth-inclusive social compacts for incremental gains for youth participation in democracy and development and in maintaining peaceful societies”

It may seem lofty but ladies and gentlemen but do not allow the size of the responsibility to intimidate you. We all have firsthand knowledge of the situations in our region in relation to the negative changes that have been increasingly occurring. From the disappearance of manners and courtesy to the ease at which some commit violent crimes, we have far too many destructive examples that prove that we are living in changing times. But in a world where conflict and disrespect are fast becoming too much of a norm, it is incumbent on each of us to take up our respective positions in the fight to inject more hope and understanding in our societies. As you share, discuss and formulate plans and objectives for future courses of action, I wish you to be cognizant of the fact that your single or collective contribution can be the long awaited solution and catalyst for overwhelming positive change.

Much energy has been expelled in acknowledging our faults and shortcomings as a society and I encourage you today to now boldly take steps forward as you seek to formulate practical and effective solutions to conflict and the breakdown and understanding within and between communities. Blame and relentless guilt must stop as such elements only retard our progress.

We are all partners in the struggle to see our world transform into a more peaceful and harmonious place. Schools, churches, families, communities, business entities, NGOs and generally people with good intentions and willingness to assist must continue to their efforts. And for those who have not started, the adage stands true: there is no better time than now. The Government of St. Kitts and Nevis categorically stands with you and the other Commonwealth Heads of Government in the universal quest “to explore initiatives to promote mutual understanding and respect among all faiths and communities in the Commonwealth.”<sup>1</sup>

To this end, the work of the Commonwealth Youth Programme must be commended for its fervent enthusiasm to find solutions to our region’s problems. Congratulations on your work thus far and I trust that you will continue to give young people and other groups, the platform to have their all-important views heard.

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<sup>1</sup> Statement made on behalf of the Commonwealth Heads of Government to the Secretary General at the Heads of Government meeting in 2005

We note with great pleasure your decision to focus on activities promoting respect and understanding women, education, the media and young people as priority areas. Participants, the Commonwealth Youth Programme and the Pan Commonwealth Head Office have taken their places on the battlefield by organizing this prestigious meeting and the presence of so many stakeholders here shows that you too are ready to battle against the scourges that plague us. I urge you not to take your participation lightly; do not be afraid to express the creativity and ingenuity that I know rests inside each of you. You would not be here unless someone thought that you had something meaningful to contribute.

So today I dub you artists. Colour these consultations with your energy, passion and commitment to effect positive change so that at the end we may see an even more beautiful picture of beaming hope and promise. Our communities need you, our countries need you and the region and world are begging for some relief from the worsening plague of negativity, disrespect and misunderstanding.

Your involvement here today speaks volumes and I look forward to the outcomes with great anticipation. May God bless and keep you in all your present and future endeavours.