

ADDRESS BY HON. MINISTER ANDREW HOLNESS
MINISTER OF EDUCATION JAMAICA

2009 ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL(ECOSOC) ANNUAL MINISTERIAL
REVIEW REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING ON HIV AND DEVELOPMENT IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Salutations:

It is important that as a Region we come together from time to time to discuss common issues with a view to finding common solutions to problems that affect our peoples. The past two days were spent by Ministers of Education and Health and other delegates from the Caribbean Region to review issues relating to education and health and to share best practices in the various fields of both areas.

Now we are joined by our Latin American Counterparts and this is an opportunity for us to broaden the discussions and again find common solutions across a wider geographical area.

HIV/AIDS is one of the issues that we have been grappling with and is one in which the impact to our national development and economies is similar.

While HIV and AIDS continue to dominate the global development agenda, Caribbean and Latin American countries have sustained efforts towards the prevention of new infections. This coordinated approach to effectively control/contain the spread of the epidemic, has maintained a remarkable momentum which must be furthered.

Since the first reported case of HIV and AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean in the early 1980s, regional cooperation has enabled Latin American and Caribbean countries to strategically mobilize resources towards the management and containment of HIV and AIDS. Regional Cooperation is premised on an understanding that if the epidemic is not contained, in the region, all our countries will pay a high price. This includes a reduction in the productive capacity of our peoples; high cost for health care and increased social costs.

One example of a successful regional initiative is the Pan-Caribbean Partnership (PANCAP) on HIV and AIDS, established as a regional coordinating mechanism to engage governments and civil society in raising the political profile of AIDS in the Caribbean. The Pan-Caribbean Partnership continues to mobilize resources while fostering the culture of partnership necessary to tackle the spread of the virus.

The fight against HIV and AIDS remains a regional priority and must be supported with the necessary resources to achieve the expected outcomes as defined by:

- The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted in 2000;
- The United Nations Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (2001) and follow-up Political Declaration (2006);

- The Ministers of Health and Education of Latin American and the Caribbean Ministerial Declaration (2008) in Mexico that outlined efforts and 2015 targets aimed at strengthening comprehensive and multi-sectoral prevention approaches to sexuality education.

The global financial crisis threatens to slow down efforts to adequately address human and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

As leaders, we face difficult decisions in allocating scarce resources but we must remain committed to implementing evidence-based programmes that will achieve the highest results.

We must also ensure that we use all regional and international resources to sustain existing programmes and initiatives by investing in the following:

Maintaining interest and Strategic Investment in the HIV Community, national and regional leadership must be emphasized in an effort to keep HIV on national and regional agenda. We must direct our focus on integrated development approaches that will facilitate investment in more active non-financial and low-cost options in addressing HIV. These options may include a stronger, more visible leadership and political-will that challenges barriers to prevention, care and treatment; and ensures that in-country partnerships are established to ensure that all available resources are pooled and utilized meaningfully to maximize the effectiveness of programme delivery. We should focus our investments on the following areas:

- Relevant research and high quality, timely data
- Maximizing the effectiveness of current and future investments
- Integrate our public health systems
- Implement Human Rights and Social Justice programming
- Strengthening programmes to address social vulnerability and risks
- Strengthening prevention coverage
- Strengthening collaborative responses for HIV/TB co-infection

Recognizing the need for an integrated approach to HIV Prevention, Treatment and Care, the Ministry of Education, Jamaica has acknowledged the importance of cross-sectoral partnership. An extension of this partnership is our donor coordination mechanism, the Technical Partners Planning Group, which ensures optimal and meaningful utilization of resources.

In Jamaica, there has been a shift in the management of the response to the epidemic from the Health Sector, where it is no longer perceived as a health issue only, but a developmental issue which threatens our nation's human and financial capital. This particular approach incorporates the participation of other sectors as critical players in the national response.

The implementation of the Ministry's HIV/AIDS programmatic response is informed by priorities set out in the National Strategic Plan for the Education Sector. We are making significant strides in establishing a supportive policy framework for the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The National Policy on the Management of HIV and AIDS in Schools was approved by Cabinet in 2004 and is now being revised to address gender specific and other gaps. Our Health and Family Life Education Policy is currently being reviewed to support implementation and delivery at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels and once complete, will define the role of our teacher training colleges and other key stakeholders in equipping our educators with the requisite skills and competencies to educate the population. The Government of Jamaica's HIV/AIDS Workplace Policy for the education sector is in an advanced stage of development and the Ministry of Education and all its agencies are integrally involved in the process.

We believe that sustained emphasis on policy development and implementation of programmes has stirred national interest, on the part of funding partners, NGOs and civil society. The policies, once ratified, will provide the reassurance of enabling and supportive environments for all, particularly for those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.

The adaptation of the Health and Family Life Education CARICOM Regional Framework sub-regionally is an important best practice model which can be replicated among other CARICOM Member States and our Latin American Counterparts. This model relies on a team approach with efforts focused on monitoring programme delivery and implementation supported by field and technical officers deployed to regional offices in accordance with the decentralized framework. This skill-based Health and Family Life Education programme has been successfully implemented in 447 or 38% of primary, primary and junior high, all-age and secondary high schools as part of an incremental scale up which should see all schools teaching HFLE by September 2012.

The Ministry of Health has been a key strategic partner in leading the charge in the prevention and treatment programme. The Government is committed to ensuring that quality health care is available to its citizens at affordable costs. To this end, serious effort is made to ensure that adequate supply of anti-retroviral drugs is available. We must strengthen our response to the spread of HIV/AIDS by building better, more effective partnerships with focus on prevention and capacity building. I look forward to our deliberations today as we seek to manage an epidemic whose cure continues to elude scientists.