



**Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries**

**Hon Audley Shaw, CD, MP**

**Minister of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries**

**The 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Caribbean Plant Health**

**Directors' Forum**

**Iberostar Conference Centre**

**Montego Bay**

**Monday, July 16, 2018**

**9:25 a.m.**

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Salutations:

- ✓ Mr. Donovan Stanberry, Permanent Secretary, MICAF
- ✓ Mr. Brian Crichlow, Chairman of the Caribbean Plant Health Directors Forum
- ✓ Dr. Ronnie Braithwaite, Deputy Programme Manager, CARICOM Secretariat
- ✓ Dr. Vyjayanthi Lopez, FAO Regional Representative
- ✓ Dr. Brendon Reardon, Assistant Director, United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS)
- ✓ Dr. Elizabeth Johnson, IICA Representative for Jamaica
- ✓ Other Specially Invited Guests and stakeholders
- ✓ Members of the Media

✓ Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is my pleasure to bring the keynote address at this the **11<sup>th</sup> Annual Caribbean Plant Health Directors' Forum**. I want to also welcome you all, on behalf of the Government and people of Jamaica. I extend an even warmer welcome, to our overseas visitors and friends. Do enjoy our warm climate and beautiful island home.

**Points:**

The Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries (MICAFA) considers plant health a fundamental pillar for achieving the level of production and productivity needed for the region's food security and economic growth.

This forum is therefore quite timely, especially in the face of the increasing impacts of climate change on our food security.

As a region, our ability to produce crops to meet national and regional demands continues to be plagued by many issues, chief among them threats to plant health, which have over the years, been exacerbated by the climate change.

All the traditional crops within the Caribbean that were major income earners have been affected by pests that have adversely impacted the economic performance of these crops. Coffee, cocoa, banana and sugar cane are just a few.

We can all recall the Moko disease that affected our banana sector and which wiped out the *Gros Michel* variety of banana in Jamaica. Gros Michel was a favorite of most Jamaicans.

***The importance of plant health to agriculture therefore cannot be overemphasized.*** Healthy plant material ensures high production yield, and is pivotal to protecting crops from the onslaught of pests.

We have also seen an increase of pests over the last 10-15 years. Jamaica has recently been hit by the Frosty Pod Rot (FPR) Disease of Cocoa and Citrus Greening. The Dominican Republic just eradicated the Mediterranean fruit fly - one of the most devastating pests of agriculture.

MICAF's ***Plant Quarantine and Produce Inspection Branch*** and the ***Banana Board*** are also now implementing measures to respond to the current threat to our banana: the Tropical Race 4.

Ladies and gentlemen, these threats are a constant and ever present reminder that we cannot relent in our efforts to mitigate the threats to our food safety and security.

**Other Challenges:**

We are also pressed to keep abreast of all the other factors that affect our ability to safeguard plant health. New legislation from major export markets; international agreements and standards for fresh produce are just a few of these challenges.

**Progress made:**

I note however that significant strides have been made in Jamaica's case as well as within the region.

Locally, we now have a Green Paper for our National Seed Policy. This piece of legislation, when finalized will ensure clean seeds are put into production.

Jamaica has also conducted pest prioritization training of all our technical staff, supported by this very Forum! Our Pest Risk Analysis Unit (PRAU), has subsequently been able to draft several emergency action plans for priority pests, which will allow Jamaica to be more proactive in its response to outbreaks of pests.

Regionally, we suffer the inability to protect our unique varieties and cultivars of crops. The fact that we obtain seeds through donations and other programmes also puts us at risk. It is therefore paramount to our survival that we craft a way to ensure a clean seed bank.

**Close:**

Ladies and Gentlemen, agriculture remains a significant aspect of the growth for small island nations of the Caribbean and other member countries present at this forum.

It therefore means the efforts and actions of the regional and national vanguards for plant health must reflect the realities of the space in which we operate. We must now consider innovative strategies and technologies that will see us implementing effective pre-order, port of entry and post-border measures to safeguard agriculture and plant health. ***Let's face it: a pest that enters the region becomes an imminent threat to us all!***

We are therefore depending on the Plant Health Directors of the region who will meet during the course of this week, to chart a course, which provides the strategies backed by strong advocacy and a framework for harmonization of mechanisms and structure, to safeguard the region.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish for you all productive discussions as we work together to strengthen our resilience and viability regarding plant health.

Thank you!