UNDP, Caribbean Governments Fund UWI Centre for Disaster Risk Reduction

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Caribbean governments provided seed money for the establishment of a Centre for Risk Reduction at the University of the West Indies.

The Centre will be an Institutional Focal Point for harnessing the expertise of the University to develop and implement training, research, advisory and outreach services. Its essential goal will be to reduce vulnerability of the Caribbean islands to natural hazards. It will be the point of intersection between governments, community and the University to embark on a programme that will build capacity, new knowledge and policy advice with respect to disaster risk reduction.

Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Professor Nigel Harris and Juan Carlos Espinola, Resident Representative of the UNDP (Ja), signed an agreement for the project at the Council Room, UWI (Mona) today.
Noting that the University of the West Indies’ mission is to support the growth and development of the Caribbean Region through Education, Research, Outreach to the Community and Policy Advice. Reduction of vulnerability to Natural Hazards (Disaster Risk Reduction) is a major area of need in the Caribbean, to ensure sustained Regional Development.

Prof. Harris said that over the past 18 months, the UWI has been mobilizing resources – academic staff and finances – to establish the Centre of Excellence in Disaster Risk Reduction and thanked the UNDP and Caribbean governments for providing the initial funding.

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Noting that “the UWI has a number of academics with expertise in disaster risk management”, Professor Harris said that the Centre “provides an opportunity for the UWI to partner with regional entities working in this area, to reduce the Caribbean’s vulnerability to disasters”.

Juan Carlos Espinola said that the UNDP was honoured to support the effort.

He said that he saw the Centre as “an opportunity for Jamaica to export its considerable knowledge and experience in dealing with natural hazards and disasters”.

Praising Jamaica’s national disaster management plan “as one of the best in this hemisphere”, Mr. Espinola said that with predictions for increased weather activity “the Centre will be critical in strengthening our ability to withstand and survive disasters”.

He said he looked forward to the establishment of a post-graduate programme in disaster management, which will “put Caribbean nations fully in charge of their destiny”.

It is envisioned that the Centre for Disaster Risk Reduction will be part of a larger Institute for Sustainable Development that will also contain the University's Foresighting Unit, a Hospitality and Sustainable Tourism Unit, and other units to build capacity and conduct research in areas relevant to sustainable development.
The Centre will comprise a Director and small support staff that will coordinate an interdisciplinary teaching and research programme, as well as enhance outreach to the community. This programme will be constructed by a Committee of technical experts drawn from UWI, other Tertiary Institutions, CDERA and other relevant organizations in the region. The Centre will be overseen by a Board comprising representatives of CARICOM, OECS, CDERA and other regional stakeholders.

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The specific objectives of the Centre are to provide:

- A mechanism for coordinating and focusing the University's attempts to mobilize resources in support of disaster risk reduction.
- An integrated and coordinated academic programme in Disaster Risk Reduction for the region.
- A facility to meet the training and certification needs of professionals working in the area of Disaster Risk Reduction.
- Advisory and consultancy services and policy guidance to regional governments and institutions.
- A facility for marketing and mobilizing the University's skills in Disaster Risk Reduction within and beyond the region.

Other collaborators of the Centre will be the Seismic Research Unit (St Augustine), the Unit for Disaster Studies (Mona), the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Social and Economic Studies (SALISES), the Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication (CARIMAC) and the Caribbean Climate Change Centre (in Belize).

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