

**Address by Hon. Christopher Tufton, M.P., Minister of  
Agriculture  
at the  
Private Sector Dialogue at the Hemispheric Forum of  
Ministerial Delegates Montego Bay, Jamaica  
October 27, 2009**

**Salutations**

- Dr. Chelston Brathwaite, Director General, IICA
- H.E. Irwin Larocque, Assistant Secretary General, Trade and Economic Integration, CARICOM Secretariat
- Mr. Earl Jarrett C.D., General Manager, Jamaica National Building Society
- Distinguished Guests
- Media Representatives
- Ladies & Gentlemen

Good Morning

Mr. Chairman, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome all our esteemed delegates to this historic private sector dialogue, being convened in parallel with the Week of Agriculture and Rural Life. As host, Jamaica is particularly pleased that we have been able to mobilize private sector players across the hemisphere to add their own perspective to the challenges and issues facing the sector, as

collectively we chart a course to increase agricultural production and productivity.

Mr. Chairman, it is incumbent on me to highlight the context within which we are meeting today. The world is just emerging from the most serious food crisis since the Great Depression. For net food importing countries, it exposed our vulnerability to imported foods and effectively destroyed the concept of “cheap foods”. The crisis has now focussed attention on the agricultural sector as strategic to national development and survival. Indeed, there is now a convergence of views that every country must seek to produce a critical mass of the food it consumes, in the interest of food security and rural development. We cannot afford to lose this momentum, as indeed, the prospect of feeding the world’s burgeoning population in the near future is a matter of concern. Based on data from the UN, the world’s population is poised to be increased by 37%, from 6.7 to 9.2 billion by 2050. To be able to ensure food security for the 9.2 billion people, food production will have to be doubled and this, within the context of the additional challenges of climate change and global warming.

The FAO estimates that to effectively respond to this challenge poor countries must invest on an annual basis, some US\$44 billion

in the sector, compared to the approximately \$8 billion in investment today, a five-fold increase.

Mr. Chairman, governments have a responsibility to create the enabling environment for development of the agricultural sector. This enabling environment involves the provision of critical infrastructure and services such as irrigation, extension, research and development, as well as food health and safety systems. These services and infrastructure in essence, are public goods. Governments must also demonstrate the political will to manage trade policies effectively to allow for the development of local agriculture. Beyond these initiatives, however, it is the private sector which must be the main driver. In the Caribbean we must overcome the traditional perception of agriculture as a welfare activity. This attitude has stymied real investment in the sector. At the same time, we have to be cognizant of the issues that are of importance in order to stimulate greater levels of private investments.

Mr. Chairman, reviewing your draft programme, I can see that you are well aware of these issues, as you seek to address such matters as finance, credit and risk management, marketing within the

framework of regional trade arrangements, research and development, innovation and technology transfer.

However, the State must play a key role in mitigating some of these concerns. For example, it is well known that the nature of agricultural production is risky. This risk, however, can be significantly reevaluated if the State brings to bear its extension, research and business advisory service to farming enterprises. Thereafter, we expect our financial institutions to adjust the price of credit on offer to these enterprises. Research has to be refocused to address the practical problems relating to improving productivity. There must be a critical link between research, extension and training. In this regard, collaboration among countries is critical, as experiences can be shared.

Despite the proliferation of regional trade agreements, and the attempts to increase the liberalisation of global agricultural trade within the WTO framework, agriculture remains one of the most protected sectors in the more developed countries. This speaks to the strategic importance of agriculture in those economies. There is recognition that protection of livelihoods and rural development are critical variables, which must be taken into account in global agricultural trade. Governments, therefore, have a political

responsibility to manage trade policies judiciously, so as to build local capacity in agriculture and give our farmers a chance to survive. Indeed, this principle has been appropriately articulated in several other international agreements such as *Agenda 21 and the Barbados Programme of Action*.

Here in Jamaica, the State has made tremendous investments in boosting the capacity of our extension service to provide quality technical support to our farmers. Similarly, we have increased our capacity in the area of marketing to provide information and intelligence to both farmers and end-users. Through the creation of a **Centre of Excellence for Advanced Technology in Agriculture**, we have created a new platform for collaborative research among government, academia and the private sector, in order to address the critical issues of production and productivity. We are also spending billions of dollars to provide public irrigation infrastructure, as well as post-harvest, food health and safety services. We are committed to value chain development. We are also actively collaborating with financial institutions to provide better access to credit for our farmers. As such, the time is right for the private sector to come on board.

There is no doubt in my mind that the private sector has to be at the table in forums such as this one. Although this private sector dialogue is somewhat on the periphery of the Ministerial Meeting, Jamaica intends to lead the charge in our meeting to secure for the private sector in the hemisphere, a permanent seat at the table. In this regard, we expect the private sector from this dialogue to report its recommendations to the Ministerial Meeting on Wednesday, so that we the policy-makers can emerge from our meeting with a credible plan of action to advance agriculture.