



As prepared for delivery

YOUTH FOR INNOVATION AND RESILIENCE (FIRE) FORUM

WELCOME REMARKS

BY

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JUNE 7, 2022

Thank you, Renee!

Good morning and welcome to the Caribbean Youth for Innovation and Resilience (Youth FIRE) Forum. I am particularly pleased to join you for this forum with a difference. This year, a group of exceptional young leaders working at the policy and grassroots levels took the lead on conceptualising the forum – identifying the topics for discussion; selecting resource persons; and working with us, in CDB, to coordinate every aspect of Youth FIRE.

During consultations to identify the most pressing issues facing Caribbean youth, several considerations emerged. Our youth leaders coalesced around the need to discuss strategies: (i) for combatting youth unemployment – a vexing and chronic issue even before the COVID-19 pandemic, and (ii) addressing the more recent challenge of climate change with a focus on its nexus with health.

Indeed, as we continue to grapple with the pandemic, which has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable and marginalised - some of our young people have been able to stay on track to achieve personal and professional goals and others have pivoted, moving to entrepreneurship and making strides in the digital economy. Yet, far too many continue to face and fear an uncertain future.

Some of you will know that CDB started in 1970 with a purpose to contribute “...to the *harmonious economic growth and development of member countries in the Caribbean, and promoting economic cooperation and integration among them...*” In keeping with the changing times, and still within that purpose, CDB’s updated Strategic Plan 2022-2024 focuses on the repositioning required within the Bank and across the Region to build resilience. The Bank’s strategies, investments and partnerships, therefore, continue to evolve to support opportunities and build the capabilities of all our people to exercise their full rights, to build their resilience and contribute to that of our Region.

Through the work of our enhanced Vybzing Youth Outreach Programme and our 2020 Youth Policy and Operational Strategy (YPOS) we have increased our youth engagement and our focus on ensuring that all investments recognise, utilise, and support the growth of young people’s strengths. The insights our young people share today will, therefore, inform the direction of our investments in the areas discussed.

Fora such as these create space for our youth to have a say and serve as a springboard for action! Leaders, past and present, have grappled with the issues identified – yet they persist. Who better to debate the issues and more importantly, identify solutions than those who at the height of energy, curiosity, creativity, and innovation and have the most to lose? Our youth!

To the policy makers and heads of development organisations joining us today – as our young people share their perspectives, let us make the commitments and act on them to create space for meaningful engagement, to position young people at the heart of the development discourse and to support the enabling environment they need to thrive.

Permit me to quote Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have A Dream" speech of 1963. Dr. King stated "*We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. (Tomorrow is today - my emphasis) We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there "is" such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.*" His words delivered in the context of the civil rights movement are applicable when it comes to the youth development imperative– there is the fierce urgency of now!

I am sure, like me, you are eager to hear from the speakers today. We begin with interventions from Dr. Anya Malcolm Gibbs, a clinical psychologist – from our Board of Governors' host country – the Turks and Caicos Islands and Mrs. Onika Benn, Climate Change negotiator. As a hallmark of your stage in life, I look forward to candour from you and, of course, from all speakers during the forum, as you challenge us to act on climate change and health.

Thank you!