Dr Lisa Indar, Head, Tourism and Health Programme, CARPHA and also the Chair of today’s proceedings; Honorable Shamfa Cudjoe, Minister of Tourism, Trinidad and Tobago; Dr C James Hospedales, Executive Director, CARPHA; Mr Hugh Riley, CEO, Caribbean Tourism Organization; Mr Frank Comito, CEO, Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association; Dr Akenath Misir, Principal Medical Officer of Health, Trinidad and Tobago; CARPHA officials; Government Officials; Special Invitees, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Inter-American Development Bank, I am delighted to be part of the official signing ceremony for the technical cooperation agreement for the Regional Tourism Health Information, Monitoring and Response Systems and Standards to Enhance Sustainable Tourism project.

First let me begin by conveying the apologies of Tomas Bermudez, the IDB Country Representative who unfortunately could not attend today’s event due to urgent mission travel. Also, in keeping with the allotted timeframe, I will be brief in my remarks.

The IDB’s longstanding partnership with the Caribbean in both the Health and Tourism sectors dates back to the 1980’s. Since then, the IDB has continued to
work with Governments, private sector, international organizations and academia to support infrastructural development, institutional reforms and research that contribute to increases in the quality of the Caribbean’s Tourism product, as well as the health care service delivery and population well-being of the Caribbean.

As many of you know, this Sustainable Tourism Project was funded from the Regional Public Goods initiative of the IDB, which was set up in 2004 as a mechanism to respond to and fund regional public goods, recognizing that such regional mechanisms were necessary in order to encourage country competitiveness in a global economy, take advantage of technological changes and to treat with vulnerabilities that require a collective and integrated response within a regional approach. The Regional Public Goods Initiative is also a response to the increasing importance of the South-South cooperation in the development agenda of most LAC countries and the IDB’s commitment to be an active partner in a South-South led learning and cooperation process. The Regional Public Good Initiative is a competitive funding mechanism in which project promoters are required to submit to the IDB a project proposal which is then evaluated for funding. Since 2004, the Regional Public Good Initiative has financed 114 projects,
investing a total of US$90 million in the LAC. With your indulgence, please allow me a 2 second marketing clip for the IDB in which I would like to mention that the next Call for Proposals for the Regional Public Good Initiative will be in February 2016 and I would like to challenge all our Caribbean stakeholders to take the time to carefully review the project proposal requirements on our Website and to submit for consideration: well conceptualized regional projects which leverage regional cooperation and at the same time, produce solid measurable results. For it is these types of projects that can positively impact our Caribbean region and prepare us for the future.

Thank you for allowing my 2 second IDB commercial.

Specifically, the Bank sees this Sustainable Tourism project as a critical component to the development of population wellness for the people of the Twenty Five Caribbean as well as preserving the health of the two (2) million tourists that visit our lovely shores every year. Indeed, this project is in keeping with the IDB’s GCI-9 priorities, which are nine key components of the accountability framework for the IDB’s strategic direction. In fact, this project is directly aligned to Regional Cooperation and Integration Support GCI-9 priority which seeks to foster regional
cooperation and integration that make contributions to economic development and reduce acute intraregional asymmetries.

As you have already heard from Dr. Indar, the overall objective of the project is to improve the participating countries’ capacity to provide cost-effective and quality health, food safety and environmental sanitation solutions to Health, Safety and Environmental Sanitation (HSE) threats impacting on sustainable tourism in the Caribbean by developing: (i) a regional tourism health information, surveillance and monitoring and response system (THMRS); (ii) a set of credible Caribbean-wide HSE tourism standards with accompanying certification schemes; and (iii) a training program to build capacity in food safety and environmental sanitation. While I wouldn’t want to repeat Dr Indar’s succinct summary on how important these measures are to both the tourism and health sectors of the region, I would just like to underscore how excited the IDB is about the specific component which involves the creation of regional tourism health information, surveillance and monitoring and response system. This component in our view is not only a very innovative mechanism but if done well, can provide the type of data that can assist Caribbean countries to head off potential health tourism crises. Also, this
system has the potential to be replicated throughout Latin America and even the rest of the world, for it is my understanding that no such tourism health information, surveillance and monitoring and response system currently exists. Indeed, this particular project component represents yet another stellar opportunity for the Caribbean to be a pioneer in both the health and tourism sectors.

But while we are excited, we must caution ourselves to the reality that the success of any project depends heavily on the success of implementation. And to this end, we feel confident that with CARPHA executing this project, the project will be executed within the specified 36 month execution period. In fact, CARPHA is a good friend and partner with the IDB where we enjoy a long standing productive relationship, starting way back with CAREC, CARPHA’s predecessor. This partnership has grown even closer in recent months, where we are currently working closely together in several areas. For example, the IDB and CARPHA are jointly supervising a consultancy which is currently undertaking a rapid assessment of the economic burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Trinidad and Tobago. This study will develop a comprehensive framework for
determining the burden on the economy from NCDs and will include direct medical costs, indirect non-medical costs (such as productivity) and other consequences as appropriate (for example, impact on social services and National Insurance). This study will then provide Government with current data to inform and formulate policy and at the same time to determine those specific areas where Government should make its heaviest investments to “get the biggest bang for its buck” in the fight against NCDs. Also, the IDB and CARPHA are collaborating on a technical cooperation to strengthen the preparedness, readiness, and response of Caribbean countries to address the Ebola Virus. I should also add that Dr Hospedales was invited to participate in a regional dialogue meeting in December 2015 in which he successfully convinced the meeting that if the Caribbean is to continue to prosper in all sectors, we need to keep the health sector as a strategic area for Caribbean integration. And that if we continue to work together we can collectively address new and emerging health issues facing our region, such as Ebola, Chikungunya and now, Zika.

Before I close, it would be remiss of me if I did not acknowledge the hard work and contribution of a number of key people who were instrumental in preparing
this project. Special thanks to Dr Indar from CARPHA who led the charge on this project, and never wavered in her goals, working tirelessly and even remotely when she was on duty travel to meet IDB deadlines. Also, thanks to Cherril Sobers from CARPHA who was diligent in her follow up on each and every project detail. Thanks, of course to Dr Hospedales for his leadership interventions and thanks also to the rest of the CARPHA team for their valuable inputs. Last but certainly not least, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the entire IDB team: Ian Ho-a-Shu, Priya Ramsumair, Shirley Gayle and Gregory Dunbar.

In closing, I look forward to a successful project and the generation of its key results which we are confident will contribute to improving lives in Latin America and the Caribbean.