

## REGIONAL TOURISM AND HEALTH STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOP

October 4-5, 2017, InterContinental at Doral Miami, Miami Florida

Remarks by

**MS. AMANDA CHARLES, CTO**

I extend cordial greetings on behalf of the Secretary General Mr. Hugh Riley of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and the CTO Secretariat. The CTO is a partner supporting the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) in the Regional Tourism and Health project, an initiative we view as both valuable and critical to the future of Caribbean Tourism.

The current reality is one marked by a changing global climate with various threats, challenges and uncertainties in areas related to health, the environment, climate, food security among others.

From about 2011 the Caribbean experienced a sudden increase in vector borne diseases which quickly became regional epidemics. Incidents of Dengue and Yellow fever began increasing, followed by an outbreak of Chikungunya (chick-v in 2013) and in 2015/2016 the Zika virus. What propelled this sudden increase and resurgence of these diseases is still being investigated, however what we do know, at least from the Tourism sector perspective, is that these diseases impacted the region on various social and economic levels. Affecting productivity and personal well-being for the local populace and resulting in a decrease in visitor /tourism arrivals generated from fear, some misinformation and general concern for personal and family health and safety.

CARPHA has been at the fore, guiding the regional response to health-related threats, providing mitigation strategies, health information, policy advice and training to reduce the spread and impact of all incidents of disease. In a very pioneering and proactive measure the regional tourism bodies the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) partnered with CARPHA to address the tourism and health nexus, from which stemmed the current Regional Tourism Health Information, Surveillance, Monitoring and Response project, the Regional Tourism and Health project, being implemented. We extend our gratitude to the Inter-American Development Bank, represented here by Mr. Ian Ho-A-Shu, for the financial assistance and support of this project.

I must also extend commendations to the team at CARPHA who continue to drive project implementation, I note in particular the stellar leadership and unwavering commitment of Dr. Hospedales, and the dynamism and dedicated persistence of Dr. Lisa Indar, in spear-heading this project, who works tirelessly to engage the various tourism and health stakeholders to see this project to fruition.

For the CTO, the issue of the health and safety of our people and region is paramount and we recognize also the critical role this plays in projecting a positive image of the countries of the region as safe and desirable places to live, visit and invest in! Our role in this regard is to contribute towards ensuring we can maintain and improve this image, through the provision of tools and strategies to both monitor and manage issues related to 'health, sanitation and safety'. This project provides a tangible and concrete opportunity in this regard, and we are hopeful it will be the first of what we envision as a harmonized regional approach that will be adopted and utilized by the regional tourism sector.

We appeal to the Regional Tourism Agencies and various private sector tourism businesses, particularly the accommodations sector to utilize the tourism health management system and tools provisioned by this project. We also commend the countries that have already embraced this initiative and are actively participating in this initiative.

The CTO, is committed to working with CARPH and the CHTA in advocacy efforts to institutionalize the Tourism Health Information, Surveillance, Monitoring and Response System. For our part we have had several high-levels sessions focusing on joint advocacy and promotion for implementation and to encourage stakeholder reporting of illness and use of the system. We will also be renewing the CARPHA-CTO- CHTA Memorandum of Understanding which provides the framework and foundation to continue our efforts.

For the CTO, tourism and health partnerships, recognition tools and other mechanisms for promoting the health and safety of visitors and locals is critical to safeguarding and also enhancing the quality, competitiveness and sustainability of Caribbean tourism.

~ **Amanda Charles**  
Sustainable Tourism Product Development Specialist  
**Caribbean Tourism Organization**