



PRIME MINISTER
ST KITTS AND NEVIS

GOVERNMENT HEADQUARTERS,
P O Box 186,
ST KITTS • WEST INDIES

Ref No:

MESSAGE BY PRIME MINISTER DR. DENZIL DOUGLAS, HEALTH PORTFOLIO
CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM) ON THE OCCASION OF
CARIBBEAN WELLNESS DAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 2009

It has been two years since the summit of Heads of Government of CARICOM, and the resulting Port of Spain Declaration which seeks to address the personal, social and financial burden of chronic non-communicable diseases. Caribbean Wellness Day is thus an opportunity to mark this historic summit, to celebrate our successes and review what still needs to be done.

Certainly, there has been some progress, but the bulk of the work still lies ahead of us, and will require not only the political commitment made by the Heads 2 years ago, but also dedicated resources to focus on the problem, and political will at national level, to follow through on the recommendations.

For example, the Ministers of Health have committed to smoke free indoor spaces, yet the legal and enforcement supports are not all in place. On this day, I am making a commitment that St Kitts and Nevis will ratify the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control early in 2010, and urge St Vincent & Grenadines, Bahamas and Haiti to do the same.

In the workplace, in schools, in places of worship, we are starting to form alliances and partnerships across the public, private and civil society, as we recognize the importance of supportive environments needed to "Make the right choice the easy choice".

In September 2008, the region enthusiastically celebrated Caribbean Wellness Day on the second Saturday of September, one of the recommendations of the Port-of-Spain NCD Summit Declaration, and this year, even more countries are participating, including we hope, Caribbean countries outside of CARICOM. This one day celebration is only a catalyst to focus our attention, to encourage regular physical activity and healthy eating as a way of life. Every day should be a wellness day.

We see this taking effect, for example, in Diego Martin in Trinidad. Starting since Caribbean Wellness Day last year, every Sunday, the streets are blocked to create a safe environment for walking, running, bicycling, dancing and physical exercise in the streets. This is a model that is worth duplicating in other countries, and is a prime example of creating a supportive environment. We congratulate the private sector and civil society groups who, with the support of the Ministry of Health in Trinidad & Tobago, have maintained this initiative, and will be launching in other areas this year as part of their CWD 2009 celebrations. These are the kinds of initiatives that we need to highlight, because they demonstrate how creating a supportive environment can induce behavior change.

Love That Body – Caribbean Wellness Day's slogan has been adapted and adopted across the region, and really reflects the challenge and the opportunity. When we love our bodies, we treat it with respect, which means healthy eating, active living, no tobacco and compliance with treatment for those already with disease. It's the only way.

Denzil L. Douglas (Tr)
Prime Minister