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CARIBBEAN FOOD CROPS SOCIETY

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REFLECTIONS ON THE SYMPOSIUM

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Mr. Chairman, we have had a very educational and informative three sessions, starting with the Opening Ceremony, followed by a Session on Institutional Issues and finally, one on Technical Issues. At this stage, we certainly do know more of Invasive Species in the wider Caribbean. Also, we do have a sense of a deep commitment by all to work together to effectively address this matter in a manner that will facilitate trade, especially intra Caribbean trade whilst at the same time protecting the rich biodiversity and natural resources of the sub-region. I would like to say something on the geographic scope of the Caribbean based on participation at a symposium. It primarily encompasses the Caribbean islands, Guyana, Suriname and Southern United States. Perhaps, in the context of the political initiatives to forge greater South-South linkages, it could be appropriate for us to increase our geographic coverage of this Initiative to include all of the countries washed by the Caribbean Sea. The interpretation infrastructure that is always provided by the CFCS would address any language barriers.

Returning to the programme, the Session on Institutional Issues placed the Invasive Species Strategy (ISS) within the Context of the CARICOM Single Market and the Economy and the Jagdeo Initiative which is the mechanism being used by CARICOM (with technical involvement of the Dominican Republic) to catalyse the repositioning and invigoration of a new and holistic agriculture. The potential (albeit limited) of the University of the West Indies (UWI) to support the ISS was also identified. It is significant that these presentations addressed the CARIFORUM countries. However, it must be recognised that, in this grouping, UWI is only one of at least 13 Universities that could assist in the academic support to the development and implementation of the ISS. A larger and more representative sample of these institutions must be included in the future.

Of particular importance in a wider geographic scope is the institutional link to Metropolitan France and the impact of the guidelines, standards, etc. being pursued there on the rest of the Caribbean. This could play itself out most specifically in the Trade Arena.

The need to give the potential impact of Invasive Species on the environment and biodiversity as much importance as that on trade and the economy was also highlighted. Finally, the progress and some issues relative to the Operationalisation of the Caribbean Regional Invasive Species Intervention Strategy (CRISIS) were highlighted. I would return to this aspect of operationalisation.

The Session on Technical Issues highlighted programmes and work being done in Florida, Dominican Republic and by French Institutions in the Caribbean and the Pacific Oceans. It also detailed efforts to initiate work in the English speaking Caribbean. Information Systems and data bases that have been designed for monitoring Invasive Species and facilitating their identification were also presented. I am relatively short on detail for the Session on Technical Issues. This is due primarily to time constraint and my own bias. With respect to the later, I wish to make it clear, especially since I spent the first 15 years of my career either doing or

directing research activities, that I recognise and appreciate the importance of technical issues. However, I am also very certain that technical issues can only bear appropriate fruit if it is done with a specific goal foremost in mind. In the case of the Invasive Species Strategy (ISS), this goal must be to enhance trade and protect the natural resources and thus contribute to sustainable national development. To achieve this goal, there must be an all embracing and responsive enabling environment in the entire Caribbean that will facilitate and nurture the conduct of the required technical actions.

It is within the above context, I revert to the question of the operationalisation of CRISIS. The successful operationalisation of CRISIS depends on involvement of all countries within the Region. I note an inequity between the sub-regions to effectively contribute to this operationalisation. Based on the presentations, it will appear that the scope and capacity of the enabling environment and thus the institutional capacity varies. The CARICOM countries and, to a lesser extent, the Dominican Republic, are now at the stage of putting in place the enabling environment to allow work to begin on the technical issues. They are all in the planning stage. Whereas the French Countries and Southern United States are already in the doing stage and have the institutional capacity to accelerate this work in keeping with the operationalisation plan for CRISIS that was presented.

Accordingly, for the Invasive Species Strategy (ISS) to be successful and for all countries to be confident with respect to the presentation and/or management of Invasive Species, there would be need for differential/preferential treatment provided to the CARIFORUM (CARICOM plus Dominican Republic) countries. I am positive that the details of such a programme could be developed by the experts.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, this Invasive Species Initiative has continued its progress during this Workshop. However, there is still much work to be done so that the “finishing line” could be reached in the shortest possible time. I am confident that the Working Group would ensure that this progress is not only maintained but exceeded.