

May 24th 2011

- The Honourable Dr. Tim Gopeesingh – Minister of Education
- Dr. Murtchinson Melville, Acting Chief Medical Officer, Ministry of Health
- Dr. Trevor Gardner – President of the University of the Southern Caribbean
- Professor Paul Blair - Provost of the University of Trinidad and Tobago
- Mr. Michael Fraser – President of the Disabled Peoples International
- Chairmen and senior members of the Ministry of Health, Regional Health Authorities and private medical facilities
- Senior members of the Ministry of the People and Social Development
- Allied Health Colleagues on the Council of Professions Related to Medicine
- Executives members of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists
- Invited guests, (members of the media),
- ladies and gentlemen

Greetings and good afternoon. It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this combined landmark event of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists hosted by the Trinidad and Tobago Occupational Therapy Association on behalf of the Association of Caribbean Occupational Therapists. Our national association, TTOTA, has been a member of the Caribbean Association since 2004 and it is indeed an honour for us to welcome the Executive Management Team of the World Federation for their week-long Interim Executive Management Meeting. This contact gives us the opportunity to avail ourselves of their expertise in innovative practice, education and standard setting. We are certain this will be to the benefit of the profession in Trinidad and Tobago and by

extension the public we serve.

I bring greetings also on behalf of the Chairman of the Caribbean Association who regrefully could not be with us here today. Our Chairman, Mr. Ken Figuera, one of many experienced Trinidadian occupational therapists working overseas, holds an occupational therapy post in the Cayman Islands. He sends his apologies with the following message:

“On behalf of the Association of Caribbean Occupational Therapists (ACOT) the opportunity is taken to welcome the WFOT delegates attending this auspicious event, as well as the invited guests representing both the public and private sectors.

The Occupational Therapy profession in the English speaking Caribbean has a history dating back to the late 1950's when it took root in Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago. This event today is historic in so far as it confirms a relationship with the world governing body for the profession, that started when our organisation was given associate status (in 1994).

It is hoped that the deliberations will be fruitful and our goals achieved. We seek the support of this body in attaining an outstanding need for the region, a need of some 19 million people, with less than thirty Occupational Therapists, that is, the need for an indigenous Occupational Therapy education programme.

We want the delegates to enjoy the sights, sounds and the hospitality of the Caribbean in the twin island state. We wish to thank the invited guests for being part of this event; by your attendance you confirm your support for this noble profession.” Ken Figuera

I join Ken in my hope that this meeting will produce meaningful dialogue between all stakeholders and will result in a wider and sustainable strategy through which occupational therapy can be returned to its rightful place as a vital healthcare profession in the public sector.

Fortunately, I believe that Ken and my other OT colleagues are not merely hoping in vain. In fact, we believe that we are currently working at a time, entering a new frontier, where there is more and more of a convergence between economic, social and healthcare policies and the long-held tenets of our profession. Our profession has always been for full-inclusion, full participation. It has always been client- or people-centred. It has always been focused on function or in our language, occupation. We have always recognized the dynamic relationship between the person, the environment and engagement in occupations. Happily, these notions are becoming mainstream and now appear in national, regional and global policies.

On this note, I would like to extend congratulations to the People's Partnership on the occasion of its first anniversary today. We view the Peoples Partnership's "Framework for Sustainable Development" as another example of the convergence of national policies with not only the goals of our professional associations, but with the potential national contribution of our profession. Were occupational therapy to exist in each of its traditional practice settings (hospitals, schools, workplaces, prisons, and communities) what a positive impact it could have on all of the 7 Developmental Pillars of the Framework. Of most relevance to us at this stage though, as stated in the message from our Caribbean Chairman, is PILLAR 5: A More Diversified, Knowledge Intensive Economy – Building on the Native Genius of Our People. We are certain that the development of native occupational therapists through an education programme is a strategy that will support the sustainable deployment of local occupational therapists in the service of the other 6 Pillars.

While the WFOT Executive team is here with us, we will be meeting with representatives of tertiary education institutions as well as stakeholders in Tobago. I am sure that these stakeholder meetings will result in something meaningful, as evidenced by your presence here today. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you again to the first such stakeholder meeting. Welcome and thank you.

I would now like to hand the mike over to Ms. Camilla Cox, who will chair the rest of this afternoon's proceedings. Camilla is the WFOT Delegate for the Caribbean and in that capacity has ably led the planning committee in organizing the events of this historic week. She has done this in addition to holding her post as an Occupational Therapist in the Tobago Regional Health Authority where she works in mental health as well as in the child and adolescent centre. I give you Camilla.

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