

Concluding Remarks for 2016 SIS Award Ceremony

13th December, 2016

All protocols observed.

Good Morning. I feel honoured today to be speaking on behalf of the Seismology in Schools Programme – Trinidad and Tobago. When first approached by Prof. Aftab Khan, a Trinidadian-born emeritus professor of the University of Leicester, and a recipient of NIHERST's Awards for Excellence in Science and Technology, I was immediately drawn and intrigued by the prospect of this programme. Geosciences and in particular, seismology, is extremely relevant to our twin island – Trinidad and Tobago.

With a number of fault lines running beneath T&T and its environs, we lie in an area of high earthquake activity and ought to be well aware of how seismic activity can affect us and how best we can prepare. As Dr. Robertson mentioned earlier, the magnitude 6.2 earthquake which took place exactly one week ago serves as a stark reminder of this. Owing to our colleagues in the profession of seismology, we are able to understand why the damage created by this 6.1 magnitude earthquake within T&T, was far less than that of the 6.5 earthquake which at around the same time, took place on the other side of the world, in Indonesia. We were able to avoid catastrophic effects due to the magnitude and depth of this earthquake in relation to our population centres, whereas Indonesia faced the collapse of dozens of buildings and a death toll of over 100 persons.

The SIS programme within T&T allows students to play the role of a seismologist right in their classrooms and determine characteristics of an earthquake such as those just mentioned. And together with the practical activities found within their kit boxes, students can now link these real world occurrences to the theory on their Physics and Geography curricula, thereby reinforcing key concepts and aiding considerably in their understanding of the subject matter.

Having been involved in this programme since its inception, I must however reveal that there were a number of challenges facing the prompt adoption of the programme within the pilot schools. Although SIS – T&T stems from a successfully run programme in more than 400 schools within the UK, the T&T installation required some tweaking and customisation to suit our situation.

However, the challenges are being addressed and the programme is on its way to a successful execution due to the support of many players, whom we would like to formally recognise and thank today.

Firstly, we wish to express our appreciation to the co-founders of the programme – Prof. Aftab Khan of the University of Leicester, Mr. Paul Denton of the British Geological Survey, Dr. Ian Bastow of Imperial College London and Dr. Richard Hobbs and his past students at the University of Durham, for initiating such a useful programme and providing the content and training required for its implementation within T&T.

We are also extremely grateful to our local partners who made execution of this programme possible and continue to provide invaluable support as the programme continues to grow. They are the Ministry of Education, in particular the Curriculum Planning and Development Division and the Information Communication Technology Division (ICTD), as well as the University of the West Indies Seismic Research Centre. The Curriculum Officers involved in the programme, namely Ms. Tricia Gilkes, Ms. Simone Robinson, Mr. Allister Ramrattan and Mr. Patrick Ramdath, have facilitated all necessary approvals required for the integration of the programme within the schools' system as well as provided expert opinions in their respective subject matters, which were conducive in the development of the work books that link the SIS activities to the CSEC curricula. The ICTD has provided the necessary IT support required to undertake the workshops and continue the programme's activities within the pilot schools.

Our dear colleagues at the UWI's Seismic Research Centre has worked with us from inception to develop the technical arm of the programme and provide their scientific expertise. We are deeply appreciative of the input provided by Dr. Richard Robertson, Dr. Joan Latchman, Mrs. Stacey Selman-Edwards, Mr. Lloyd Lynch and especially Mr. Omari Graham – who led the technical component of all our outreach efforts.

We would also like to thank our Ag. President - Ms. Sylvia Lalla, who has placed priority on ensuring that the SIS Programme continues to receive funding under NIHERST's recurrent budget in spite of the country's economic downturn, as well as, Mrs. Maureen Manchouck and Ms. Joycelyn Lee Young, NIHERST's former President and former Ag. President respectively, for their insight and guidance during the initial implementation of the programme.

A special thank you goes out to all our speakers this morning for imparting their wisdom on the programme and sharing in our enthusiasm. Thank you all very much for taking the time out of your busy work schedules to be here with us today. And a very special thank you goes out to the six schools that participated in this year's workshops and competition. Thank you to the dedicated teachers who led the SIS programme, within their respective schools and the students who eagerly participated in the activities of the programme. We hope to have inspired you all to the possibilities involved in geosciences and to have your eagerness transcended to the younger generation of students. We are also hopeful that you will continue to champion the initiative within your schools.

And last but not least, I would like to thank the staff at NIHERST who has supported the programme implementation to date. They include the Administration Department, the Marketing Department and the Science Education Department, and the International Projects Unit – including Ms. Lovaan Superville, Mrs. Simone Marie King, Ms. Darielle Rampersad and especially our MC today, Mr. Rondell Liverpool. Rondell has shown excellent initiative and diligence in taking the programme forward and organising today's event. Thank you very much Rondell.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for joining us here today and for your interest in the Seismology in Schools Programme and its 2016 competition. We hope that our speakers today have been instrumental in further encouraging your enthusiasm on this valuable programme and informing you of the potential that exists within geosciences and its role in promoting sustainable socio-economic development of the country. Congratulations again to all the winners.

Please enjoy the rest of the day, ladies and gentlemen.