We must congratulate Rev. Seopul Singh and the Indo-Caribbean council in pioneering ground-breaking efforts to create a disaster-free society through this disaster preparedness workshop; the Guyana diaspora demonstrates great commitment to developing Guyana, and we welcome a remarkable way of conspicuously showing that “brain drain” can be transformed into “brain circulation” - the intervention of diaspora talent in national development in Guyana. The great flood of 2005 has come and gone. There are both optimistic and pessimistic expectations about the May/June rains and what may transpire as a result of these rains as a possible flood threat. The World is experiencing unstable weather patterns. In many foreign countries, the winter season is not as cold as previous years. We will just have to wait and see what unfolds in May/June next year. The flood may not happen in the traditional May/June but in August or September or perhaps not the next year, but two years from now. The weather pattern is so unstable that we have to start thinking in an untraditional manner. Everything is not that conventional anymore. The Earth is not the same anymore. Climate change is the cause of numerous disasters around the world. Global warming ought to be presented as the culprit. Damon Cush, a Journalist, said “Global warming is going to make other small local environmental issues seem like peanuts because it is the big one which is going to come and completely change the face of the Earth.”

In November 2000, large areas of the United Kingdom were flooded; both the government and the environmental agency apportioned the blame to global warming. This was Britain’s wettest weather in 300 years since records were kept. Guyana has now experienced its wettest period from December 24, 2004 to January 2005 since recording data in 1882. On the occasion of the great flood of 2005 in Guyana, although the preparedness level was minimum, the Government’s response was immediate and generally quite appropriate given the unprecedented rainfall levels and limited resources of this country. We must also acknowledge the local, private and international organisations that also played a superb role in supplementing the Government and the Guyanese people’s efforts. I said in a newspaper article of February 7, 2005, that it is time
for holistically preparing the Guyanese people to tackle disasters and the University of Guyana must lead the way by setting up a Disaster Management Center where the end goal will be to create a disaster-free society. This type of Center should have the synergy for both natural and man-made disaster management. Mitigation, preparedness, response recovery, and relief should form the basis of the disaster management’s philosophy as it executes its functions and responsibilities.

I would like to lobby for a Disaster Management Center. A Disaster Management Center would have to be integrated with national development policies. I think the important points to mention here and we all pretty agree in this area, is that national development policies or national development strategies or development plans have to be integrated with disaster risks. We have to combine the two. I refer to them as development disaster ratio or disaster development formula because disaster can jeopardise development as we all know and development can also reduce disaster risks. Perhaps we can even say that development can create disasters too!

I think it is important to know that and we must accept that development has to be coordinated with respect to its impacting disaster risk. We have to link disaster risk and government issues as developmental concerns. So finally, in a general sense a Disaster Management Center will have the onerous task of revising the disaster development relationship at the political level. There is a great turnout at the workshop and wish Rev. Seopaul Singh success in marshalling these efforts.

Thank you.