Welcoming Remarks Opening Ceremony IX Session ICG CARIBE EWS

Christa von Hillebrandt-Andrade, Chair

Honourable John P. de Jongh, Jr., Governor of the USVI, distinguished heads and members of
delegations, observers, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me a great pleasure to be among the first to welcome you to the Ninth Session of the
Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Tsunami and Other Coastal Hazards Warning System for
the Caribbean Sea and Adjacent Regions (CARIBE EWS). We are extremely thankful to the officials who
have so diligently worked on all the arrangements for this meeting. I would especially like to recognize
Director Lewis, and his team within and beyond the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management
Agency. Almost 20 years ago the USVI scientist Roy Watlington hosted in St. John the first gathering of
Caribbean scientists to discuss the tsunami threat and planted the seed for what has become our
CARIBE EWS. We are so glad to see all the advances since then here in the US territory and the
Caribbean, it is no longer “El Peligro Olvidado”, “The Forgotten Danger”.

Almost 10 years ago we all witnessed the immensely destructive nature of tsunamis as the waves
washed over the coasts of so many Indian Ocean Countries causing the loss of over 225,000 lives. In
2010 we witnessed with dismay how the earthquake in Haiti brought down too many buildings, killing
too many people, causing too much grief. But then, then we have also seen in Chile and Japan, that big
earthquakes do not have to kill so many people, and yes people will die from tsunamis, but much fewer
if governments have plans and systems in place and people are educated and ready to respond.

Since we gathered last year in Trinidad and Tobago, we have definitely continued to work with passion
and diligence in the region to advance our Tsunami and Other Coastal hazards warning system and this
week we will recognize important milestones and also debate on how to continue to grow the System. I
would just like to highlight a few of these:

- In September 2013 the Caribbean Tsunami Information Center was officially established in
  Barbados with the hiring of its interim director, Ms. Alison Brome. Now it needs the support of
  Governments and Organizations so that it can execute its business plan, who and how can the
  CTIC be resourced?
- CARIBE EWS also has appreciated and recognized the services provided by the US Pacific
  Tsunami Warning Center and the renamed US National Tsunami Warning Center, and this year
  the earth kept them busier than usual. But what will be the updates with regards to the
  establishment of a Tsunami Warning Center in the Region?
- On March 26, 47 of the 48 MS and territories participated and almost 200,000 people were
  signed up for CARIBE WAVE 2014, more than four times the amount from 2013. Just last week
  we had the most successful unannounced communications test, even better than the ones in
  the Pacific. Surely the 3 SOP workshops helped the MS be more involved. What will be the
  scenario(s) for CARIBE WAVE 2015? Who can provide the funding for more training, so
  necessary especially with the eventual rollout of the enhanced products?
• Since we met last year there are 20 more TsunamiReady communities in Puerto Rico and the US and British Virgin Islands, including two territory wide recognitions. For many years our Member States have recognized the virtues of Performance Based Community Recognition Programs like TsunamiReady, are we going to be the first ICG to agree upon guidelines for regional recognition?

• Over 100 seismic stations and 60 sea level stations from around the region are contributing their data so the tsunami warning centers can provide the fastest and most reliable tsunami services. In addition, a Caribbean wide GPS network which holds promises for enhanced tsunami warning systems is almost fully implemented. But we still have some gaps. How can we sustain and complete our observational network?

• There are now over 50 evacuation maps in the region, but still most countries do not know how high the tsunami that can hit their shore can be, nor do they have evacuation maps. Are there opportunities to strengthen tsunami inundation and evacuation mapping efforts?

Indeed, we have come a long way since the first Caribbean tsunami gathering 1996 in St. John and the first CARIBE EWS meeting ten years later in Barbados in 2006. Over the next three days we need to establish priorities and make recommendations as we continue to move forward with a Tsunami Warning System that responds to the needs of our MS and Territories to protect lives and livelihoods, because that is what it all comes down to. How can we best protect our residents, visitors and economies from these infrequent, but deadly waves that will one day strike again our shores?

Once again, thank you to the people and government of the US Virgin Islands for providing the perfect setting for these discussions and all of you for being here.

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