Chairman’s Remarks

Access to safe, decent and affordable shelter continues to be one of the most serious challenges in our country today. This situation is especially critical for the most vulnerable people around us – low-income vulnerable families. It is further exacerbated by the effects of climate change – increasingly powerful storms, torrential rainfall with the resultant flooding and vector-borne diseases. This is why the work of Habitat for Humanity has become even more relevant in the national and regional context.

Since we began operations in 1997, we have ensured that our services have evolved and expanded not only to meet the needs of our homeowners but also to actively support the national drive to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It may surprise you to know that housing is a driver, catalyst and contributor for 13 of the 17 SDGs. Adequate and affordable housing is a multiplier of community jobs and income and is a prerequisite for inclusive, equitable, safe, resilient and sustainable cities.

While we stress the importance of housing to our mission, our work is not confined to the building and repair of houses. Through hard work and collaborative advocacy with like-minded civil society actors, we are able to offer a suite of support activities to our national community to meet the shelter needs of many diverse groups. This was demonstrated by our work in the aftermath of last October's flooding disaster and the recent floods following Tropical Storm Karen’s passage.

You may not be fully aware that we have also been working in Dominica since its devastation by Hurricane Maria in 2017, helping the country to “Build Back Better” by providing skilled construction personnel and extensive training to upgrade technical skills in the local labour force. This is a recent addition to our menu of services, along with disaster mitigation and emergency planning for the disabled communities, and has been very well received by local and regional authorities.

Now, while these are the services we can and do provide, our ability to do so depends in large part on our ability to attract supporters like all of you. Every one of us must recognise that we are all able to do something, for ourselves and others. And it is this second part – doing something for others – that helps to define the idea of teamwork, making us conscious of the goal that no one must be left behind.

The Dalai Lama has said, "I believe that at every level of society - familial, tribal, national and international – the key to a happier and more successful world is the growth of compassion." This is a call to take small, yet significant actions in your life and to plant the seeds of compassion in your interactions.

With this in mind, we are pleased to invite you to be a supporter of our membership programme. This is an initiative on which we have been working for some time and which we will unveil in the coming months. The intent is to create an even greater sense of community and belonging among our Habitat volunteers and supporters. Through the programme, we aim to spread the knowledge that we all have something that can be given – ideas, skills, material or money. No gift is too small, and certainly, none too large! By recruiting supporters and volunteers from among friends, family and other associates together we can make inadequate housing a thing of the past in our beloved country.

As you would have watched this space over the last few years you would have detected, a probably not too subtle shift, in some of the challenges and activities of the organisation. This year, the board in its triennial strategic review, took the opportunity to engage in some organisational visioning. Emerging themes included: Enhanced Fundraising; Organisation Structure and Design; Securing Land Tenure; Operational Funding; Branding and Awareness and Delinquency Management. These issues will be receiving the attention of the board in this coming year as we seek to reposition the organisation to respond to its new demands and funding realities.

These remarks would not be complete if I did not make special mention of the efforts of our dedicated management and staff for making this fiscal period one of transformative action. The old saying of “cutting one’s suit to fit the cloth” was very applicable as the organisation adapted to a new normal, where funding was scarce and where we had to change our approach to meeting the still present shelter solution needs. Team Habitat Trinidad and Tobago took the bit in their collective teeth and attacked the task with gusto (as usual) leading to another commendable year of achievements. Well done and thank you, Team!

I also take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank my colleagues on the Board for their unstinting service for yet another year. Their continued commitment, dedication and drive are inspiring to me and the team alike. May God continue to bless you richly for your generosity of spirit.

To our valued partners who have stood by our side through thick and thin, who continue, even in challenging economic times, to provide financial and other forms of support, we thank you. Your contributions allow us to provide hope, to elicit smiles of gratitude and tears of joy from those that benefit from your kindness.

Habitat for Humanity® Trinidad and Tobago is a part of a global organisation with accountability to our Latin and Caribbean (LAC) office. This year more than any other in my time at the helm of the organisation I have been able to experience the strength of the support of ‘head office’.

On behalf of the Trinidad and Tobago team I wish firstly to congratulate Ernesto Castro Garcia on his appointment as Area Vice President for Habitat Latin America and the Caribbean Region. Through him I wish to thank all of the other continental team members for their unwavering support over the last year. I especially want to thank Mrs. Karen Foreman the former Acting Area Vice President and Mrs. Monica Ramirez for always advocating for Trinidad and Tobago. We see this as a signal of your continued confidence in our programme and our capabilities and we look forward to your increased support as we continue our work in building the Habitat brand in T&T and the English speaking Caribbean.

Finally, to the collective Habitat family of the board, management, staff, donors, volunteers, contractors and homeowners, it has been an honour to serve another year as Chairman of this inspiring organisation and I express my sincerest gratitude to all of you for your ongoing support. May the next year bring even richer rewards as together we work toward a brighter and better Trinidad and Tobago.

Derwin Howell, Chairman - Habitat for Humanity® Trinidad and Tobago