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### AMBASSADOR SPEECHES

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Speech by Ambassador Pamela E. Bridgewater at the Medical Association of Jamaica Awards Banquet

Jamaica Pegasus Hotel - June 4, 2011

Good evening to Dr. Winston De La Haye, President of the Medical Association of Jamaica; Dr. Aggrey Irons, president-elect of the Medical Association of Jamaica, Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy, president of the Trinidad Medical Association; Professor Errol Morrison, president of the University of Technology, members of the Medical Association of Jamaica, honored guests:

It is my pleasure to be with you this evening as the Medical Association of Jamaica, the MAJ, honors its 2011 awardees, and prepares for its annual symposium. I commend the MAJ membership for your dedicated service as medical professionals but, also for your activities that advance Jamaica's medical services.

This year's MAJ symposium focuses on topics that are of great interest to me: Population density, urban planning and their impact on health, adolescent pregnancies, and the use of technology to advance healthcare. I am so pleased that the MAJ has a major focus on wellness and prevention.

While treatment of disease is, of course, the major focus of the medical profession, prevention of disease is every bit as important. After all, why treat a disease if you can prevent it in the first place? We know that maintaining a healthy lifestyle is much more economical than costly medications and invasive medical procedures.

So I thank the MAJ for the many ways you promote better food choices and healthier, more active lifestyles. A healthy and well-informed citizenry contributes to a more efficient workforce and more prosperous communities, and that is a society in which everyone wins.

We in the diplomatic corps are well aware that our partnerships often strengthen bonds of friendship between nations. Certainly no partnership touches people more directly than our collaborative work in the health sector. I am proud that the United States Mission has, for many years, supported the people of Jamaica in the realm of health.

The US government agencies that work with local partners to achieve results and support the Ministry of Health's national program are the Centers for Disease Control, the Department of Defense, the Peace Corps, USAID, and the Department of State itself.

Our support for and approach to supporting Jamaica's national health program are diverse. Our Peace Corps Volunteers, for example, work at the grassroots level to promote clean drinking water and sanitation, teach how to prevent lifestyle-related diseases like diabetes and hypertension, and, teach young people how they may protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases and HIV.

The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which I chair at the embassy, works together with the Ministry of Health, Jamaica Defense Force, and several dynamic NGOs. The PEPFAR program's primary goal globally is to reduce the prevalence of HIV infections.

In Jamaica, the goals are also to strengthen the ability of governments and regional organizations to improve the quality and availability of clinical services for HIV/AIDS and related opportunistic infections, and to strengthen health systems to sustain the delivery of quality HIV prevention, treatment and support services at all levels.

The Department of State recognizes that stigma reduction must be a key component of any effective HIV eradication campaign. Through my Ambassador's Fund for HIV Prevention Program, I make grants to organizations that focus specifically on educating their fellow citizens, and reducing stigma. This funding complements our very effective clinical programs. You are likely aware that PEPFAR AIDS relief is the largest effort by any one nation in the world to combat a single disease.

I am very proud that President Obama, like Presidents Bush and Clinton before him, has remained so committed to the PEPFAR program and that we have committed entities in Jamaica such as the Jamaica Business Council on AIDS and the Government to work with us in to transition to sustainable programs when funding ends.

Over the past nine years, the United States Government, through USAID, has devoted more than \$16 million to support adolescent reproductive health programs in Jamaica. These programs focus on promoting greater access to youth-friendly services, supporting Jamaican policies related to adolescent reproductive health, and implementing mass media campaigns promoting abstinence and safer sex practices. And all these programs use participatory, youth-centered approaches that are crafted by and therefore resonate with Jamaican youth.

In April Jamaica welcomed the USNS Comfort to her shores for a medical and humanitarian mission. Working alongside physicians from Mexico, Nicaragua, Canada, Panama and Jamaica, the crew of the Comfort performed more than 125 surgeries onboard and provided primary health care to more than 2000 Jamaicans ashore at no cost to them. While the Comfort's presence in Kingston's harbor was impressive, what was more impressive was the amazing medical care that was delivered to Jamaicans through our partnership.

Through our prestigious Fulbright fellowship program, over the past 40 years we have sent more than 50 intelligent Jamaicans to the United States to study public health, biochemistry, counseling psychology and several other medical-related disciplines. Indulge me as I note with great pride that your current MAJ president, Dr. Winston De La Haye, is a Fulbrighter.

Our Public Affairs Section frequently hosts visiting scholars who have lectured on mental wellness, the benefits of Jamaica's indigenous plants, and many other topics related to health and wellness.

You have my commitment to that the U.S. embassy will continue to program such scholarly exchanges.

I took the time to outline our various areas of support to illustrate the similarities in the approach that the United States and the MAJ take to supporting Jamaica's national health program: collaborative, holistic solutions to health challenges.

And now, please let me focus on the four awardees whose contributions we have gathered to celebrate this evening.

"I think it is the highest award you can get when you're recognized by your peers." "Whenever you're appreciated by your medical associates, it is always an honor for your colleagues to recognize you for your contributions." "This award honors colleagues who have made a significant contribution in the development of medicine in Jamaica and the Caribbean."

These aren't my words - they come from this evening's award recipients! In preparing my comments this evening, I asked my assistant to contact the awardees and know from their responses that they are people who have inspired their colleagues, their families and their communities.

I could not agree more with these comments about the meaning of receiving honor and recognition from one's peers, particularly in the medical field, on which so much of a nation's success, security, economic development, and achievement are built.

I therefore congratulate warmly Dr. Sonia Thomas, Dr. Venice Bernard-Wright, Dr. Leroy Pottinger, and Dr. Archibald McDonald.

These physicians remind us of how important public service is to human development, and their contributions do indeed support the goal of "optimal health and well-being of society."

Dr. Thomas lectured at Spanish Town and University Hospital of the West Indies - perhaps she was a former professor for some of you in the room! A tremendous advocate for pediatric medicine, she continues to inspire us all.

Dr. Bernard-Wright, while leading a hectic private practice, spends several hours a week serving at the Women's Resource and Outreach Centre in Kingston. She founded the Women's Health Awareness Group, the first menopause support group in Jamaica. Thanks to her efforts, menopause in Jamaica is less shrouded in mystery and mature women, together with their physicians, are better able to make more informed decisions about their post-menopausal healthcare and wellness.

Dr. McDonald's leadership in the Department of Surgery at the University of the West Indies resulted in an increase in research publications.

Dr. McDonald successfully introduced a Doctor of Medicine program in Ophthalmology, expanded the Faculty of Medical Sciences and helped to develop a trauma registry for injured patients at the University Hospital of the West Indies. I understand he is the only person to receive this award twice. Congratulations twice over, Dr. McDonald!

"A keen analytical mind, eloquence, an elephant like memory and an unwavering commitment to the cause of doctors in Jamaica," is how past Presidents of JMDSA describe Dr. Pottinger. His commitment to providing patients the best and fastest care possible have made him a legend among patients and his fellow physicians alike. What a testament!

Tonight's awardees are busy with their practices and their academic duties, their families and a myriad of other community

commitments. Yet, they have made the time and the means to advance the medical profession in Jamaica, and they have created opportunities for young residents and medical students. Thank you for your service, and for your commitment to volunteerism.

As I close, I'd like to offer both a commendation and a challenge to the MAJ and your president, Dr. Winston De La Haye. I commend you for the advocacy work you have done in the fight against drug addiction, for pursuing health care provider benefits, for your examination of the buggery act, and your speaking out against violence against women.

I thank you for adding your influential voices to these causes which are so important.

I know that the physicians gathered here understand that homophobia is an issue that negatively impacts the both the victim, and the perpetrator of the bias. And so I challenge you to stand with me in raising awareness about homophobia, and the health and wellness of the LGBT community in Jamaica. As MAJ focuses holistically on the wellness of Jamaica, please consider the wellbeing of all Jamaicans.

Thank you.

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