

**Many Hazards, One Caribbean**  
**by Tony Gibbs**  
**Consulting Engineers Partnership Ltd, Barbados**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Caribbean is an area "blessed" with an uncommonly high incidence of natural hazards. The use of the word "blessed" is not entirely frivolous. History has shown that the fine arts and creativity flourish in areas of natural "dangers". It is as though living with danger provides a stimulous for inventiveness and an inspiration for grand designs. It is not clear that the golden era of the Caribbean is at hand but we must not think that it will never come. Getting back to the main subject, we must aim to experience the great events of nature in the future as fascinating, wondrous and awesome occasions which nevertheless do not cause insupportable damage, destruction, injury and death as well as unaffordable setbacks to our economies. It must be obvious to everyone here that the goal of sustainable development of our region cannot be achieved if we continue to suffer avoidable damage and destruction from natural hazards.

The goal of experiencing natural hazard events without the accompaniment of severe damage and destruction is achievable in the foreseeable future. It is almost achievable with our present scientific and technological knowledge but not with the present shortage of financial resources. At the same time we must not be misled into accepting that success is only possible at great cost. What is certainly lacking now is the clearly-stated and honest intention to succeed. Success is only possible if we really desire it.

The political leaders do not organise our societies in such a way as to achieve success in this area because the people do not demand success. Our societies are still fatalistic about disasters accompanying natural hazards. These catastrophes are still largely blamed on God rather than on the inadequacies of mankind. The phrase "act of God" is still used in commercial contracts in most of our countries and, indeed, even in the metropolitan countries that we look to for a lead. The very name of this Decade (International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction) is a misnomer. It suggests strongly that disasters from natural hazards are natural. They are not. The disasters are largely manmade. It is too late now to change the name of this Decade