**Welcome to Women in Maritime Association Caribbean conference**

**By Premier Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA**

**8:30 a.m., Monday, 5 September, 2016**

**Marriott Hotel, Grand Cayman**

(Protocol)

Good morning,

On behalf of the Government and the Cayman Islands people it is my pleasure to bring you a warm Caymanian welcome to this first Women in Maritime Association, Caribbean Conference, WiMAC – Charting the Course for Generations of Women.

This is indeed an important day for us, just as it is for you.

I understand that the news of the formation of the Caribbean association at the inaugural meeting last year in Jamaica was received with great enthusiasm here in the Cayman Islands and the news that you chose these Islands to host your first conference is a great honour for us. I am told we have about 16 Caribbean countries represented here for this first conference; again I say welcome.

I believe it is fitting that the first regional WiMAC conference is being held here in the Cayman Islands because like all of the Caribbean islands, our history is rich in seafaring tradition. Shipbuilding and sea-based occupations have been a part of Cayman’s history since the first permanent settlements in the early 1700s. For generations Caymanians were known as first-class mariners and were captains, navigators and crew for many of the world’s largest shipping companies.

My father and grandfather were both able bodied seamen as were hundreds of other Caymanian men; thousands really. Just about every Cayman family has a strong connection to our beautiful waters and the darker blue, which lies beyond the horizon. Not many Caymanian women went to sea; I recall two or three. But when our men went to sea our women remained behind and kept the home fires burning if it were, becoming pillars of our society.

This was likely true for all of our islands back then and indeed most of the world. Today much has changed and women now also ply the seas in all sorts of roles. I note the key spokesperson in your inaugural meeting in Jamaica last year was Commander Antoinette Wemyss Gorman, the first female commanding officer of the Jamaica Defence Force Coast Guard who recounted her arduous journey on entering the coast guard and getting to that high level.

And so it is fitting that Cayman is involved with WiMAC and that one objective of this this conference is to foster the development and participation of women in the maritime sector and contribute to the growth of the industry in the region.

In the days of yore the compass, the sextant and the stars were the tools for sailors to follow the charted course.

There was no GPS. No radar, no satellite telephones; just the sea, sun and stars. Back then charting a course depended on intuition and experience.

My how we have advanced; today there are more and more tools at our disposal so that in many ways our young people, young women as well as young men, are constrained only by their imaginations and ambitions. We continue to invest in their growth and are committed to creating opportunities for them.

Indeed this year Government appropriated $152 million or about US$190 million for education purposes, which includes scholarships. This is the second largest item in our budget besides money spent for national security and is one indication of the priority that we place on the education of our young people. I would be more than pleased if our young people saw fit to tap into this funding to pursue careers in the maritime industry. In addition, the Maritime Authority of the Cayman Islands and the Ministry of Education have joined efforts to offer maritime scholarships to encourage youngsters to pursue a variety of careers in the maritime industry.

The future of the countries represented here today lies squarely in the hands of the generations to come. That you have gone to the trouble of assembling here to talk about planning and helping to chart a course for them is a wonderful thing and I salute you and your organization wholeheartedly.

I make special mention of the role of the International Maritime Organization, represented here by Ms Pamela Tansey, Mr. Brendan Marshall, Mr. Colin Young and Ms Anushka Alleng. I gather that the IMO is the driving force behind the formation of the association and indeed much of the support for this conference.

To the IMO, MACI, WiMAC (Women in Maritime Association, Caribbean) and WISTA (Women's International Shipping and Trading Association) I say a big thank you.

 And so it is my real pleasure to welcome you to these Islands. I hope you will tarry long enough to enjoy the beauty of this country. I know you will already have experienced the warmth and welcoming nature of our people. I wish for you and your conference all the success as you chart the course for generations to come.

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