

(Salutations)

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Once again we have come together to celebrate books, writers and writing in the NGC Bocas Lit Fest 2013. Over the past days we have enjoyed the readings, lectures, music, and, of course, fellowship, as we paid homage to this most intimate of art forms.

Speaking on behalf of NGC, we consider it a privilege to be able to contribute to this outstanding event and expect this year's NGC Bocas Lit Fest to have been as profoundly enriching and enjoyable an occasion as 2012. From the number of people attending the festival, I can see that the NGC Bocas Lit Fest met and surpassed all expectations. Your presence is a validation of the NGC Bocas Lit Fest and those who worked so tirelessly to make it happen.

This is the third Bocas Lit Fest and the second in which NGC has been the title sponsor. And we are just as excited – no, even more excited – to take part this year as we were in 2012. The festival is growing. There is more excitement, more participation and much greater awareness. Best of all, this is still just the

beginning. I have no doubt that in a few short years this will be one of the Caribbean's signature literary events.

It was Philip Pullman, the enormously talented and sometimes controversial British author who said, "after nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world."

We understand the importance of storytelling. Stories help us through the personal struggles we face in life. They bring us smiles in sorrowful times and are our lively companions when we are alone. Stories hold organizations together; give them a shared sense of mission and purpose. Stories are the building blocks of family and community. By sharing them, we share each other. Stories are even the glue that keeps nations together. They show us that we are more than disconnected people living on rocks in the sea.

We understand that working sometimes with the minimum of support, confronted by external and internal challenges, our storytellers, writers and poets need assistance so they can uplift and enrich us. They massage our heads and our hearts. They give us comfort, peace and much joy.

It is for this reason that NGC is so deeply committed to the NGC Bocas Lit Fest. Our writers – writing itself – deserve the support of society. We want to help

reward their good works and encourage them to create new work. We want them to know that we recognize them and are grateful for what they do for us all.

In closing, I would like to congratulate the organizers of the NGC Bocas Lit Fest. You work so diligently and with such little fanfare to make this special event happen. All of us – writers, poets and anyone with an interest in the arts – owe you a debt of gratitude. You have done outstanding work and NGC looks forward to partnering with you again.

To our fellow sponsors, the media and members of the public who have taken part in the NGC Boca Lit Fest – we thank you. This festival cannot be a success without you.

And to our writers and poets, practicing and aspiring – tell your stories. Society needs you.