EXPERT GROUP MEETING
IMPLEMENTING RIO+20 INTEGRATED PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE COASTAL AREA MANAGEMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN REGION

1. INTRODUCTION

His Excellency, Ambassador Jumeau, Ambassador for Climate Change and IDS Issues, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Seychelles to the United Nations, Organizers, participants, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

My thanks and appreciation to the organizers for giving me the opportunity to deliver a Keynote Address at this important meeting of Experts, that has been called to inter alia, help put in motion, the implementation of some aspects of Rio+20. At the same time let me congratulate the organizers for putting this particular event together – Integrated Coastal Zone Management is critical to the very existence of our Caribbean people. Many of our Caribbean countries such as Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados and Guyana, have large concentration of people living within kilometers of the coast. In fact, in Guyana, 90% of its people can be described as coastal people. Our beaches are the hub of the tourism industry, the life blood of many of our economies.

The World Travel and Tourism Council describes the Caribbean as the most intensive tourism region of the world. On the other hand, in a paper by Dr. Michelle Mycoo of The University of West Indies, it is predicted that it will be the most at risk tourism destination between 2025 and 2050 and we need to take note of this.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

MC, 1992 was a watershed year for our planet with the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio. It painted a picture that was bleak and called for immediate action. It made it quite clear that mankind was on a collision course with disaster. That with a population of 6 billion,

the planet was overstressed. That meeting the basic needs of food, energy, clean water and shelter for all was a major challenge. That humanity was approaching a crisis point with respect to the interlocking issues of population, environment and development. The global population today is 6.5 million and is expected to reach 9 billion by 2050. The challenge then will be even more formidable.

With rapid economic growth in the Far East, environment problems will increase and that is already being witnessed. China's staggering economic growth over the years continues with at projection of 7.5% this year. But it is paying a heavy price – the air pollution, the smog is taking a toll on the health of its people. What the Beijingers are learning is that you cannot simply stop the planet and get off – they, I suspect fell trapped and imprisoned within their own city walls.

UNCED 1992, to quote our late Angela Cropper and I quote "was meant to usher in a new approach to development that was to be more planet centered and people centered" end of quote. Hence, the emphasis on the 3 dimensions of Sustainable Development – social, economic and environmental.
1992, more than started a conversation, it gave hope and created an awareness amongst the global citizenry. Unfortunately, 20 years later in terms of what was achieved, the negative outweighed, in my view the positives.

THE NEGATIVES

- Greenhouse gas emission targets were not met.
- Biodiversity loss continues.
- Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption continues.
- International cooperation leaves much to be desired.

THE POSITIVES

- Gradual shift from fossil fuels to Renewable Energy – Germany, the model environmental nation, the greenest of the greens, lead the way.
- Some success with respect to poverty reduction and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.
- Greater involvement of civil society – this is most encouraging as civil society in my view holds the key to implementation and
- The growth in scientific knowledge.

We the scientists have played and continue to play our part. We are getting a clearer understanding of how the Earth System operates that is the complex physical, chemical and biological interactions between the atmosphere, the oceans and land which create the environment that sustains life. Through the International Science Council and UNESCO, we have established

- ✓ The International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP)
- ✓ The World Climate Research Programme (WCRP).

What is clear from the knowledge acquired thus far, is that the rates of change in many environmental indicators are increasing and most disturbingly, are likely to increase even more over the next few decades.

Rio+20, "The Future We Want" provided an opportunity to take stock, set new targets and a new agenda, to identify obstacles, to strengthen international cooperation and to get Governments to demonstrate greater political will. One only hopes that Rio+20 will yield better results than Rio 1992.

In the post Rio+20 period there already has been a meeting in 2013 in New York on Oceans, Seas and Sustainable Development.

In 2014, there will be a SIDS meeting in Samoa into which I hope this meeting will feed.

Amidst this all, a Plan of Action or the way forward for the Caribbean within the context of Rio+20 should emerge. The Technical Support Team document does put forward some suggestions here and these include:

- Ensuring conservation and sustainable use of the Oceans and Seas and of their resources
- Reducing the incidence and impacts of marine pollution
- Addressing ocean acidification and impacts of climate change.

3. BASICS

Environmental problems tend to be global for the simple reason that the major modes of transportation of pollutants are via the two global convective systems – the oceans and the atmosphere. Nonetheless, the problems in general, need to be treated at three levels – national, regional and international. At the national level, we must deal with basic problems such as the management of plastics that litter our beaches and clog our waterways.

About a decade ago on a visit to India, we were on our way to spend a few days at a resort hill station, when at the entrance of the village we saw a sign that read "Plastic Free Village". I often wonder why plastic bags are so readily available at our supermarkets. Three decades ago when I first visited Germany, we discovered very early, that if you want plastic bags to bag your groceries you pay for them. We soon did what Germans do – purchase cloth bags.

We need to deal with plastic through education and the community. Sometimes we need to go beyond that and enact enabling legislation. In 1986, Barbados and the State of California enacted legislation to deal with

beverage containers. Norway initiated such legislation as far back as 1902. Here in Trinidad and Tobago, we are without such legislation which though has been in the making for about 18 years. A Beverage Container Bill made a brief appearance in Parliament in 2012 and then placed on the back burner. It is my sincere hope that the Government of the day will fast track this – reintroduce in Parliament, have it enacted and most importantly, implemented, so that we can deal in a methodical manner with the disposal and/or recycling of empty beverage containers.

Action at the regional level is sometimes useful and this meeting of Experts fall into this category. Given our fragile economies, our vulnerability to natural disasters, our dependence to a large extent on tourism, common sense demands that we collectively deal with coastal area management – share experiences, best practices, expertise and information. This kind of cooperation would for example, enable us to monitor and better understand the movements of coastal pollutants in the Caribbean.

Barbados and Belize, I understand, have strong Integrated Coastal Zone Management units, established I believe in the 1980's and they can help others build capacity.

Trinidad and Tobago has been rather late on the scene, I guess because Tourism was/is not a priority item. An Integrated Coastal Zone Management Steering Committee was appointed by Cabinet only in 2012. Ms. Rahana Juman, a member of that Committee is participating in our Meeting. Consequently, over the years there has not been a holistic approach to dealing with coastal area problems both in Trinidad and Tobago. That hopefully will change.

At the international level, we need for example, to deal with problems of the ocean. An average of 13,000 pieces of plastic are estimated to be afloat on every square kilometer of ocean with potential to harm sea life.
International cooperation also enables us to monitor and meet targets.

4. THE MEETING

Let me now briefly turn to the meeting. The programme is a most interesting one starting with an overview, moving to challenges and special sessions on

- Integrated Coastal Area Management within the context of Rio+20
- Tools to support the implementation of initiatives.
- Best Practices and
- The Way Forward.

There are also opportunities for short presentations.

Let me identify, from where I stand, what I consider to be some key issues that challenges us

a) Spatial focus

SIDS can be considered to be small entities and therefore viewed as coastal entities. Hence, we should not narrowly focus on a coastal strip but must also examine watershed management practices, hillside development and hillside squatting.

b) Land management practices are generating land based pollutants that can destroy fragile coral reefs and beaches
c) Land reclamation
d) Lack of land use policy that include the entire coast
e) Access to greater financial and technical resources
f) Legislative reforms and political will to enforce existing regulations.

We may here wish to look at the best practices in countries like Barbados.

5. CONCLUSION

Man has polluted the land on which he lives, the water in which he trade, swim and fish and the air which he breathes. As a consequence

- 40% of the world's agriculture land is seriously degraded
- 60% of our ecosystems have been degraded over the last 50 years
- 27% of all known mammals are threatened
- 37% of fresh water fish species are threatened with rapidly declining stock of sea water fish
- 70% of our plants are threatened.

The warming of oceans and seas have resulted

- In seal level rise- 4.5 ft by end of century
- Migration of fishes to cooler waters and the stunting of their growth
- Destruction of our reefs – 90% are at risk by 2030
- Ocean acidification due to increase carbon dioxide in our sea water
- More powerful hurricanes

Sandy's visit to New York resulted in US$60 billion damages – approximately 4 times the annual budget of Trinidad and Tobago- the wealthiest country in the region.

Ours is the responsibility to arrest and start reversing this situation. For a start though, Governments must invest more on climate change adaption.

As scientists and workers in Coastal management Units, your contribution is invaluable if we are to regain the pristine nature of our beaches, coastal zones, seas, oceans and thus make our planet a more habitable place for future generation. That Ladies and Gentlemen must be our legacy.

I thank you!!