

Expert Group Meeting

**Implementing Rio+20: Integrated Planning
For Sustainable Coastal Area Management
In the Caribbean Region**

Address by

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And

SIDS Issues

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Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen

This expert group meeting is timely because we are currently discussing, at the United Nations in New York, the place and role of oceans and seas, including coastal and marine ecosystems, in the Sustainable Development Goals, the SDGs, and the wider Post-2015 Development Agenda.

But we must learn from the past while looking to the future and at how our oceans and seas will feature in the post-2015 sustainable development framework.

Despite decades of effort to promote and implement integrated management of our coasts and near shore waters to varying degrees of success, our island and coastal communities continue to struggle, and sometimes even regress, as one new challenge is piled upon another.

Ocean acidification, for example, only emerged in the last decade or so to be added to the growing list of adverse effects of climate change.

These in turn further complicated attempts to get a grip on and reverse such long-standing problems as the unsustainable extraction of marine resources, marine pollution, alien invasive species, and the physical alteration and destruction of marine habitat.

Much is being said in the ongoing discussions, debates and negotiations on the SDGs, the Post-2015 Development Agenda and climate change about how critically important oceans and seas are to the wellbeing and future of humankind.

In fact, so much is being said, especially following the unprecedented attention oceans and seas received at Rio+20, that island and coastal states and communities are finding ourselves having to continually remind everyone that we are more dependent than anyone else on oceans and seas.

Simply put, no category of countries is more vulnerable to the changing climate and to ocean and coastal degradation than the Small Island Developing States, most of which are large ocean states in terms of their huge maritime territories. After all, almost all SIDS are coastal zones in their entirety.

The aide-memoire to this EGM states: “Many threats to the region’s marine and coastal ecosystems persist, such as unsustainable coastal development, climate change, overfishing and marine pollution.

“Furthermore, weather and climate extremes and sea level rise, as well as coastal flooding and erosion, continue to negatively impact the tourism industry, which is an important contributor to employment, foreign exchange and economic growth in the region.

“In many Caribbean countries visitor earnings can account for more than 25% of GDP.”

When I first read this I said to myself, “This sounds familiar!” But I’m not from the Caribbean. It sounds familiar because this could have been describing my own region, the Indian Ocean, or the Pacific for that matter.

In my own country Seychelles, for example, tourism is responsible for 27 per cent of our gross domestic product, 30 per cent of jobs and 70 per cent of foreign exchange earnings. Fisheries, our second biggest industry, add another eight per cent to our GDP and provide another 11 per cent of jobs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- The increase in the number, types and complexity of the pressures and impacts on coastal areas,
- the inadequacy and sometimes failure of the methods used and action taken to manage our coastlines and near shore areas over the years, and
- the approaching deadline for us all to agree on a post-2015 sustainable development framework,

make a meeting such as this more relevant than ever.

But it is not just about the need for more or better managed marine protected areas, or for more efficiently and effectively governed fisheries, or even the growing urgency to better protect our reefs, beaches and coastlines from an increasingly encroaching and angry sea.

All these have always had to compete, and will have to increasingly compete, with incessantly growing demands for more and better jobs and incomes, food and water security, homes and infrastructure, and means of recreation.

And for those of us who live on islands, we have no-where else to provide for all these competing demands and requirements than along our already-congested, heavily stressed, and in some cases shrinking coasts.

But we cannot just throw money and concrete at the problem, assuming we have the money in the first place. The fact that responsibility for addressing these challenges and meeting these needs falls under different ministries and agencies further complicates the matter.

It appears to me we need an even more integrated, cross-cutting approach to bridge implementation gaps, especially where fragmentation of responsibilities and efforts has not done the job. Cross-sectoral coordination and the increasing use of marine spatial planning are key here.

We need an ecosystem approach where bricks and mortar have not solved, but may in fact have worsened, the problem. Let's help Nature to fight back, repair, rehabilitate and enhance.

We need a more inclusive consultative approach that harvests the knowledge and know-how of all stakeholders, coupled with – and here I'm speaking as a former government minister myself - the political courage to admit that the top does not always know best.

We need a precautionary approach in the time that it takes to develop and implement science-based management. Capacity and institution building do not happen overnight.

We also need cross-boundary and regional approaches for transboundary, straddling and highly migratory species. We cannot manage things sustainably on our own if our neighbours aren't sailing in the same direction.

And we also need to have a better understanding of what we mean by resilience, not just of marine and coastal ecosystems, but of the human side of it too, starting with coastal communities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Twenty-two years ago Agenda 21 called for the integrated management and sustainable development of coastal areas. This was reiterated in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and, for island countries in particular, the Barbados Plan of Action and the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation, and more recently the Rio+20 outcome document “The Future We Want”.

We will no doubt give it more attention at the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Samoa this September.

But the challenges of sustainably managing our oceans, seas and coasts in an integrated manner do not only persist: they continue to grow and in far too many countries and along too many coastlines the situation is in fact getting more difficult by the day.

Meanwhile the 2015 deadlines for implementing Rio+20 and agreeing on both the world’s future sustainable development framework and on how best to fight back against climate change are fast approaching.

Let’s get to work in doing our bit to help prepare for these...

I thank you for your attention