

**STATEMENT BY THE MOST HONOURABLE PORTIA SIMPSON MILLER**

**PRIME MINISTER OF JAMAICA**

**TO THE**

**UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**21<sup>st</sup> June, 2012**

**Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

*Please check against delivery*

Madame President,

Heads of State and Government,

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Madame President, I take pleasure in congratulating you on your election to lead the proceedings of this historic conference. We have every confidence in the strong leadership of Brazil in steering this conference to a successful conclusion. You can be assured of the full cooperation of Jamaica in achieving this objective.

I wish to thank the Government and people of the Federative Republic of Brazil, and, in particular, the citizens of Rio, for their extremely warm and friendly welcome to your beautiful city. I appreciate the courtesies extended to me and my delegation. I also wish to commend Brazil on its organisation of this Conference.

Madame President,

I bring you greetings from the government and people of island of Jamaica. Jamaica is a land so naturally blessed with natural resources, that its name, given to it by the Tainos of old, means 'land of wood and water'

Yet in the 'Land of wood and water:

- Once robust rivers have become meandering streams or dry footpaths.
- Once verdant hillsides and lush valleys have become barren and brown.
- Once predictable weather patterns are much less foreseeable, leaving even our seasonal fruit trees so confused that they cannot distinguish the 'seasons', and altering their bearing patterns.

The bounty of nature bequeathed to our island has, over time, become affected by the vicissitudes of civilization.

This 'bright and beautiful ' isle caused the Reggae Artiste Bob Marley to sing, "Sun is shining, the weather is sweet..." has in a generation, so changed, that it has caused his son Ziggy Marley to sing the lament:

"Beautiful mother nature, looked at me with a smile on her face, then started to cry....when she was young she was beautiful and strong, the more children she had, the more things went wrong..."

This change of tune, in just one generation, indicates the need for swift and decisive action to come out of this process which started two decades ago.

Twenty years ago, world leaders meeting here in Rio agreed on an ambitious path towards sustainable development. The intention was to put development along a course which would integrate economic and social development within an environmental framework.

Jamaica took the view at that time, a position to which we still hold that Agenda 21 and the principles of the 1992 Rio Declaration were fundamental in achieving sustainable development. Also critical to us as a small state was the attention given in Rio to the needs and interests of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) which led two years later in 1994 to the adoption of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

Madame President,

Twenty years later, we have returned to this very place to ask ourselves, how far and how much have we really achieved since then. This Conference is our first accounting of the progress made since 1992.

It has to be acknowledged that progress has been mixed as the levels of development, environmental protection and social inclusion envisaged in 1992 have fallen short of international aspirations.

The unacceptable levels of poverty and underdevelopment which still exist in developing countries underscore the wide gaps between developed and developing countries and between social groupings within our countries. These need to be addressed urgently.

We can readily agree that there has been some progress including increased political commitment at national and regional levels and greater awareness of sustainable development. However, twenty years later we all must quickly admit that there is much that remains to be done. As leaders, we must take responsibility for ensuring that it gets done.

Madame President,

'Sustainable development' is without meaning unless it takes full account of the 'triple bottom line' - the social, economic and environmental pillars. We must use these three pillars to redress historic social inequities, build an economic base to improve standards of living and enhance the resilience of our economies to external shocks and natural hazards.

For our part, in Jamaica, early in my administration I sought to cluster land and water with climate change under a single Ministry to ensure that it is approached with an integrated focus.

This is a critical area of concern for us as developing countries in general, and small island developing states in particular, which have unique vulnerabilities. We are vulnerable because of:

- The openness of our economies,
- high levels of poverty,
- inherent limitations of economic diversification,
- limitations of capacity
- and of course, being prone to natural disasters.

Additionally, developing countries also have to cope with

- the current global financial and economic crisis,
- food insecurity,
- rising energy costs
- and climate change.

All of these factors are interlinked. Our vulnerability to natural disasters has been heightened by the impacts of climate change. As each year passes we are increasingly seeing more variable rainfall patterns, increased tropical storm activity and sea level rise.

These events can devastate small economies and significantly retard economic growth for a long period of time, putting at great risk the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Smaller economies also face unacceptable outcomes of:

- low GDP growth,
- fragile industries,
- debilitating effects of crime and violence,
- and high levels of debt, unemployment and poverty.

Jamaica therefore agrees that GDP alone is not a sufficient measure of human development. GDP masks inequalities and limits our capacity to source concessionary financing to facilitate the achievement of development objectives.

We look forward to the design of more appropriate measures which will take other variables into account and better reflect economic well-being. I therefore call on the international community to actively explore and design more creative and effective flexible financial instruments and concessionary products to counter the effects of debt, reduce poverty and minimise and address risks and eventualities.

Specifically, one such measure is to address the urgent need for a mechanism for catastrophic insurance for reconstruction and recovery after a major natural disaster. Such a mechanism

should provide long term concessionary financing to affected states without stringent conditionalities.

Most importantly, our global quest for sustainable development must be linked to poverty eradication because, as we balance the books we also have a duty to balance peoples' lives.

On the matter of the Green Economy initiative:

Jamaica broadly supports the initiatives toward a Green Economy. However the question remains whether the green economy will bring the poor into the centre of economic growth and development and improve the lives of our citizens.

The green economy as it stands:

- Can impact the ways in which developing nations pursue and engage intrade activities with the introduction of international environmental benchmarks and standards that can impose new conditionalities and barriers to trade.

For small, vulnerable, lower and middle-income economies, the Green Economy initiative has the potential to

- negatively impact employment;
- it can impact jobs; and opportunities for decent work as labour is replaced by technology.
- it can impact rural communities.

So even as we see its benefits, we must insist that every effort be made to ensure that the Green Economy does not become a market-driven concept that benefits only developed countries.

It is also critically important that the concerns of Small Island Developing States are included in the follow-up processes which will take place after we leave Rio in 2012

In this regard Jamaica welcomes the call for the convening of the Third International Conference on SIDS in 2014 and urges the necessary commitment to ensure that this Conference becomes a reality.

Madame President,

Of particular interest to my delegation are the ways in which highly indebted middle income countries will factor into the new development paradigm.

I urge continued attention to the concerns of this group of countries in accessing concessionary forms of financing and for other criteria to be used in determining aid and assistance.

We must also strengthen the framework in relation to financing, especially for adaptation to climate change.

Madame President,

As we recommit to a global development path aimed at eradicating poverty, we have to ensure that our efforts are in keeping with the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. Our sustainable development agenda must strengthen multilateralism and above all adopt an approach that is just, inclusive, accountable and all-embracing.

We are being called upon by all citizens to take bold steps to attain 'the Future they Want'.

I like to believe that we as Jamaicans share something special with Brazil in the person of your prolific songwriter and environmentalist Gilberto Gil. His love of, and consistent performance of Reggae music brought your Portuguese language to our Jamaican Rhythms. It is his words

that remind us of the commonalities in our vision and the similarities of our collective mission.

He sang simply,

*Seaside*

*Common place*

*Begin of the walk*

*To another place.*

Let us as respond to this call to action and carry the vision forward to the place, the world we want for ourselves.

I thank you.