



PERMANENT MISSION OF BELIZE TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT DELIVERED BY H.E. MR. STUART W. LESLIE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BELIZE ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY AT THE THIRTEENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) who are Members of the United Nations. CARICOM aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the Group of 77 and China (G-77) and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

The importance of an integrated approach to the management of water, sanitation and human settlements for countries as those in the CARICOM cannot be overstated. This is particularly true because of our size. Every action in pursuit of development has impact on and implication for the sustainable development of every other sector and the interdependence of these sectors heightens our vulnerability.

In the case of CARICOM countries, major urban centres with industrial and commercial activity are located principally in coastal zones. Tourism development, the mainstay of many Caribbean economies, is also concentrated in coastal areas. This has increased rural to urban migration along coastlines.

The vulnerability of these urban coasts has been exacerbated by population growth. Indeed, the Caribbean is the most urbanized island region in the world, with an urban population that grew an average of 1.58 percent annually from 1995 to 2000, and a significant number of our countries are already predominantly urban.

The trend towards urbanization provides additional pressures on the environment and increases vulnerability to natural hazards, particularly among the poor. Deterioration and 'malfunction of the municipal water supply, poor maintenance and overstressed distribution systems have created added problems in water resources management in urban areas.

In most cases urban expansion inevitably implies unplanned spread beyond the urban fence onto lands important for agriculture or protection of the watershed. Unplanned, informal settlements in the hinterlands, populated mainly by the poor, invariably lack the requisite sanitation infrastructure. Improper disposal of waste has inevitably led to pollution of the water table in many instances, thus freshwater supply. Unplanned settlements in the peri-urban areas also has resulted in encroachment on protected watershed areas, which has diminished water retention capacity of the soil, and thus negatively impacted freshwater flows.

For CARICOM Member States, therefore, the inability to meet the challenge of providing adequate sanitation services has often resulted in increased pollution of the coastal waters vital to the economic viability of our islands. At the same time, unplanned urban spread, often onto unstable hillsides has resulted in increased deforestation, watershed depreciation, reduced river flow, the undermining of water catchment areas and the pollution of water tables. The combined impact of this is the heightening of the vulnerability of our countries, with the potential for disaster increased in the wake of extreme weather events.

CARICOM Member States therefore strongly share the view that it is impossible to pursue effective management of these sectors without a comprehensive strategy to address the needs of the poor, both urban and rural. Of course there are times when even the best plans and preparation cannot avert disaster. Witness the plight of our sister island Grenada, which last year saw more than 90% of its housing stock destroyed by hurricane.

CARICOM further supports, within the fashioning of urban development strategies and sustainable land-use policies, the integration of risk management interventions that address critical threats. More attention must be given to programmes for housing the poor. This remains a formidable financial challenge.

Our countries have made efforts to establish solid waste entities, enact and update legislation, improve waste storage and collection, upgrade existing dumps, construct new sanitary landfills, conduct training and introduce new and strengthen existing environmental education programmes. Some countries have also developed solid waste management policies as part of system development, and have also influenced the upgrading of systems by private contractors on the collection systems. National recycling initiatives have been hampered by financial constraints, limited availability of reliable markets, absence of incentive and disincentive programmes and limited scope for economies of scale.

In addition to being state parties to the various international conventions that address the sustainable development of water, CARICOM Member States have also sought to improve the legal, policy and institutional framework for water resources management. There is need to improve the Decision Support Systems within the water sector so as to improve the availability of data on water resources generally and on water and climate in particular.

There is also need for comprehensive training programmes in water resources management. The implementation of national policies and legislation is often

constrained by the absence of institutional capacity and appropriate expertise. CARICOM Member States join the call for increased financial support, particularly where the investment of appropriate technology for more effective water resources management is concerned. We reiterate our request for further exploration of the possible use of regional development banks as facilitators for technology acquisition and transfer. In this regard, some CARICOM Member States have begun exploring the advantages of integrating water resources management with energy services.

Continued attention must be given to the development of national policies for freshwater and waste management. There is also need to review outdated legislation and to strengthen the enforcement of laws regarding water resources management. Improved legislation will also facilitate greater collaboration between the private sector and the public to participate in freshwater and wastewater management.

CARICOM Member States advocate for the engagement of civil society in any strategy to advance more effective water resources and waste management. Support for public awareness programmes is very necessary. There is much scope for collaboration among local communities, the public and private sector.

The Mauritius International Meeting mapped the path to be taken to comprehensively address these critical issues within the broader framework of the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and within the context of the MDGs. CARICOM Member States believe that the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is the appropriate forum within which critical assessment and ongoing monitoring of the Mauritius Strategy for the further implementation of the BPOA must be undertaken.

CARICOM Member States therefore reaffirm the request of the Chair of AOSIS to have time designated within the review sessions of CSD for consideration of progress toward and or challenges to the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy and in the context of the specific thematic cluster under CSD consideration. This opportunity should also afford space for review of major initiatives impacting small island developing states.

Thank you.