

The
Bahamas

**12th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development
High Level Segment
Preparations for the International Meeting in Mauritius (SIDS)**

**STATEMENT BY SENATOR, THE HONOURABLE MARCUS BETHEL,
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ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)**

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As a global community our window of opportunity to adequately address the sustainable development needs of our people in the areas of water, sanitation and human settlements, indeed in all areas of sustainable development, is short. Now is the time for us to act and we must act boldly.

Mr. Chairman

In your opening statement on April 19th you stated that "the broad picture is not very reassuring, and the international community is not on track when it comes to meeting the globally agreed targets." You stressed the need to overcome hindrances and create solutions.

The statements made over the course of the last two weeks by participants from governments; the NGO community, Youth, experts and the private sector all support your conclusion.

Assessing the reports of the proceedings so far, it is a struggle not to be overwhelmed by what appears to be a daunting challenge. Such a condition however is unacceptable if we are to secure for our people their right to a sustainable future. Our responsibility, no matter how overwhelming, will overcome those hindrances and create equitable and meaningful solutions.

In the Caribbean, we have spent the last two years assessing our progress in the implementation of the sustainable development goals we elaborated and agreed to in the Barbados Programme of Action.

In 1994 we agreed with the international community on a blue print for the sustainable development of our small vulnerable economies. As our national and regional reports show, we have worked diligently to implement the Barbados Programme of Action.

We have done so primarily on our own, often swimming against a strong current that frankly has been hostile and treacherous, especially with respect to trade and development assistance. Of course there were moments of calm and we acknowledge with appreciation those legitimate developed partners, whose assistance and efforts were in our best interest.

The Caribbean Regional report reminds us that "One of our main challenges is how to pursue sustainable human development within a context of high poverty levels; limited resource endowment; constraining internal and external environments, fluctuating rates of international economic growth; weak national institutional capacity and the rising expectations of burgeoning populations." In spite of our best efforts, our economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities have been increasing.

In undertaking the review of the BPOA, particularly in the effort to produce an

outcome document for the International Meeting for the Review and Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, it has become clear to us in the Caribbean, in fact to all members of the Alliance of Small Island States that our biggest challenge is to convince the International Community of the reality of our situation, that is to say our high and rapidly increasing vulnerability.

Due to factors outside our control, we increasingly find our concerns drowned out by the overriding focus on similar problems in the larger developing countries. Again, as highlighted in the Caribbean Regional Report our pursuit of sustainable development is further exacerbated by among other things:

- a narrow range of resources which forces undue specialization;
- excessive dependence on international trade resulting in severe vulnerability to global developments;
- overuse, and hence premature depletion of resources;
- relatively small lenses of watersheds and limited supplies of fresh water;
- high per capita cost of administration and infrastructure, including transportation and communication;
- limited institutional capacities and domestic markets which are too small to provide significant economies of scale
- and reduced competitiveness.

Just as our physical existence is highly vulnerable to natural disasters due to our location, so too are our small, open, highly trade dependent economies extremely vulnerable to the realities of the new competitive global market place. A market place governed by rules that seem only to appreciate a culture of reciprocity and competition. And although it is true that the small production levels of Caribbean countries cannot significantly affect the world market, no exemption is being made for us to compete.

Mr. Chairman, our economies cannot survive without special and differentiated trading arrangements. We know this. We are living this in our region. We have seen the devastation of some of our economies due to the loss of preferential market access. We have seen our international business sector shaken by the OECD's decision to equalize taxation on mobile capital.

There is an additional obstacle we must face, today more than ever, developed countries are systemically recruiting away our most highly trained and experienced human resources. Those required for scientific and technological research and development; those who contribute to our diversity and grow our productive sector; and those who are required to train and develop our people for our public and private sector development are all being lured towards these more competitive markets.

We are well aware that the global realities dictate that we build our resilience; we know that to build resilience we must diversify our economies. We know that to

diversify our economies we must develop capacity, particularly human capacity. We know that good governance, at all levels, is critical to the attainment of sustainable development.

The countries of CARICOM have a strong tradition of vibrant democracies; we have always had open economies. As a region we have embarked on one of the boldest attempts to create a single market and economy. We are convinced that such a step is the right way to achieve progress.

Last week in Peru UNDP released the results of a poll they conducted in Latin America, the poll results indicated that more than half of Latin American citizens, some 54.7 percent, said that they would opt for an "authoritarian" regime over democratic government if authoritarianism could "resolve" their economic problems. Though this poll did not include any CARICOM country, it is nonetheless very instructive to all of us for it shows that our populations are losing faith and patience in our ability as democratic governments to resolve their economic needs. We are losing ground, we are losing credibility and we are losing time.

As we bring closure to the 12th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and as we approach the Mauritius International Meeting let us all realize the special and differentiated needs of small vulnerable economies, more importantly, let us all realize what is at stake. Together we must take the necessary steps to truly provide the means to develop capacity and enhance resilience, capitalizing on every advantage or opportunity inherent in globalization.

To insist that Small Island Developing States bear the brunt of these adjustments is to sentence our populations increasing levels of poverty, our expose our environment to unsustainable levels of risk and advance an acceptance of a culture of desperation and despotism.

I thank you.