

Intervention by Jamaica

Thematic Discussion on Land at the 16th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the panellists for setting the context for our intervention this afternoon.

Jamaica aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished delegate from Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the G77 & China and also by Solomon Islands on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island Developing States (AOSIS).

The Jamaica delegation expresses thanks for the Secretary General's detailed report presented on this thematic issue. We would also like to reaffirm Jamaica's commitment to the goals outlined in the Chapter 10 of Agenda 21 and reaffirmed in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) as it relates to sustainable land management and also in the Mauritius Strategy for the further implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

Mr. Chairman, from a SIDS perspective, where the SG's Report highlights that land practices and climatic conditions affect the condition of land resources and overall agricultural productivity and rural development, it is clear that these impacts would be exacerbated in small island states such as Jamaica because of our vulnerabilities. The Mauritius Strategy called on the international community to support SIDS in developing capacity to implement the multilateral environmental agreements and other relevant international agreements in

relation to land resources. This is particularly poignant as we grapple with the adverse effects of climate change manifested in increased severe weather events in the region in recent years, causing erosion and other forms of land degradation.

On a specific issue, Mr. Chairman, the matter of security of land tenure and access to land is one that is priority for the Government of Jamaica. Security of tenure will allow for wealth creation amongst rural (and urban) poor and in particular small farmers. With security of tenure, poor people are put in a position to unleash the true economic potential of the land because then they could have access to capital.

As for my own country, the Government of Jamaica, with the realization that only some 55% of land parcels is registered, has invested considerable efforts in the issue of security of tenure through the implementation of various land titling programmes and initiatives. We have been fortunate enough to have learnt some very valuable lessons from the implementation of a Land Administration and Management Programme, which was funded by the IDB with counterpart funding from the Government of Jamaica. The main objective of the programme was, as a pro-poor strategy, to create a dynamic land market. This pilot project saw the wide scale cadastral mapping of 30,000 parcels of land using GPS technology, and the subsequent titling and registration and also clarification. The cost for surveys and the associated legal fees are subsidized by the programme, resulting in significantly reduced transaction costs to titling for beneficiaries. Coming out of this programme was the creation of an innovative piece of legislation to assist persons in obtaining certificates of title.

The Government has learnt many lessons in going forward and has therefore decided to extend the programme for an additional five years to facilitate titling of many more parcels of land.

Part of the problem, Mr. Chairman is that of public education and awareness. In a society where land issues are very sensitive, significant efforts have to put into emphasizing the importance of property rights registration and estate planning. We certainly do appreciate that cultural norms have to be respected and not all countries can approach land titling and registration in the same manner. We however, posit that secure land rights will not only strengthen the capacities of local communities but individuals as well and is a major step towards poverty eradication. Even as we focus on security of tenure we are equally concerned about the issue of informal settlements or squatting. In addition to regularization of long standing squatter communities, Jamaica is emphasizing prevention through a greater alignment of the provision of low income housing with large scale hotel and industrial development. We are also developing a squatter management policy to drive the process.

The other issue which we are grappling with is the pressures for the conversion of arable lands to satisfy the need for housing a growing population. The government has therefore commissioned an inventory of arable lands which will be tied to a land capability investigation to guide decision-making regarding land use. This is being done within the context of the need to safeguard food security, while at the same time addressing the needs of competing interests.

Thank You Chairman.

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