

Opening Remarks

Hon. Robert D. Pickersgill

Minister of Water, Land, Environment and Climate Change

At the National Climate Change Workshop

Wyndham Hotel, Kingston, Jamaica,

July 26 , 2012

@ 10:00 a.m.

Dr. Conrad Douglas Chairman, Dr. the Hon. Peter Phillips, Minister of Finance; Ms. Denise Herbol, Mission Director, USAID Jamaica; Heads of Embassies and Missions, Senior Government Officials; members of academia; representatives of the NGO's, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen....

I would like to add my own word of welcome to all the participants at this two day workshop. You know, they say it is "better in the Bahamas". Well I say it is best in Jamaica.

My sincere thanks to you all for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here to discuss the very critical issue of Climate Change, with the goal of establishing a blueprint that will guide our mitigation efforts.

Just this week I delivered my Sectoral presentation in Parliament in which I paid tribute to the Prime Minister, Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller, for the visionary move of establishing a Ministry which has Climate Change as a substantive portfolio area. In fact, I said it during my sectoral presentation and am proud to say it again today, that Jamaica is the first Small Island Developing State, and one of the few globally that has established a Ministry of Climate Change.

There was a clear need to bring national attention to the issue of Climate Change, which cuts across all aspects of life, and has the potential to adversely affect and disrupt our economy and society.

Ladies and gentlemen, the challenge we face is not a futuristic one. Climate Change is real, it is current, and "**With Climate Change, We Must Change**".

There is a metaphor that I wish to use to describe why we must change. It is about a frog in water which is gradually heated up, the frog does not notice and stays in the water until it dies.

However, if a frog is put in water of the same heat, it jumps out immediately. Humans are sometimes slow to perceive and act. So ladies and gentlemen this is why we MUST change. If we sit there and do nothing, then we will perish.

As stewards of this planet we call home, we all have a responsibility to take the necessary action to ensure that our natural resources are utilized in a positive way to ensure their sustainability.

While land masses and bodies of water define our geo-political and physical space, there are no boundaries to the atmosphere and the air we breathe.

Climate change cuts across all hemispheres, borders, and affects all nationalities and all races. It is not the problem of one country, but the problem of every country.

In recognition of this, and with the full knowledge that Small Island Developing States are more vulnerable than many other countries to the effects of Climate Change, we are taking steps here in Jamaica to build capacity and adopt strategies to mitigate against the effects of climate change.

On April 19 this year, the Most Hon. Prime Minister established a Climate Change Advisory Board which comprises a multi-sectoral group of experts, many of whom are participating in this workshop today. This Advisory Board chaired by Dr. Conrad Douglas, was mandated to:-

- Establish a Climate Change Department
- Prepare a Climate Change Policy
- Build public awareness about Climate Change and
- Seek additional bilateral and multi lateral support for climate change projects.
- From as early as 2006, this Administration had proposed the creation of a Climate Change Unit to help drive our co-ordination and management of the country's climate change efforts.

From as far back as 2006 this administration proposed the creation of a Climate Change Unit which would co-ordinate and drive Jamaica's Climate Change efforts. In January this year, the Prime Minister another directive was given by the Prime Minister to establish a Climate Change Department.

We can see the development of this process through the following activities:-

- 1) We recently received a draft report from two international consultants from the UNDP, and are moving full speed ahead to have this department up and running by the end of this year.
- 2) The Ministry of Finance has allocated within their budget, funds for staffing the Climate Change Department.

- 3) The Prime Minister gave a charge to her entire Cabinet to support this workshop, with the mind that it will assist in identifying clear roles and responsibilities which will more quickly facilitate the establishment and functioning of the Department.

I realize that the Planning Institute of Jamaica, the Met Office, and the Environmental Management Unit of my Ministry have been dealing with Climate Change, and for their efforts thus far, I am extremely grateful. **However in the very near future, all actions regarding Climate Change will fall under the ambit of the Climate Change Department.**

They will also have a role to play in Climate Change and the appropriate co-ordinating mechanisms that are being developed at this time.

The elements of these have been addressed in the UNDP consultants' report aimed at establishing the Department of Climate Change.

Ladies and gentlemen, make no mistake about it. The Prime Minister set us on a path to adapt and mitigate Climate Change Impacts. We have begun on this path and it is full speed ahead.

We have Climate Change recognized as a Ministry, we have a Climate Change Advisory and we have a draft report on how to establish the Climate change Department. Now you will be taking another critical step on this path by helping us to move towards the development of a national climate change policy framework.

Lastly, let me reiterate a warm welcome to you all. I am honored to see so many distinguished persons with us today. I hope the workshop will stimulate thought and action and I wish you fruitful discussions.

Thank you and may God Bless you all.