

Statement
by
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Chairman
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at the
Official Opening Plenary of the
Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Workshop on the
Implementation of UNFCCC Article 6 (Education, Training and
Public Awareness)
Tuesday, 3 July 2007
Castries, Saint Lucia

Honorable Acting Prime Minister,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Invited guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to join you at this beautiful Caribbean island for an important workshop on the implementation of the UNFCCC Article 6 on education, training and public awareness. I should, first and foremost, express my sincere gratitude to the Honourable Acting Prime Minister Leonard Montoute, Permanent Secretary Donovan Williams and Deputy Permanent Secretary George James for making time – from your busy schedules – to be with us for the opening plenary, and thank them personally, and through them, the Government of St. Lucia, and in particular the Ministry of Physical Development, Environment and Housing, for the kind hosting of this gathering and excellent arrangements. But, dear Colleagues, before I proceed any further, I would like to convey, on my own behalf as well as on behalf of the Secretariat colleagues here, our deepest condolences and sorrow regarding the tragic death of Ms Marcia Philbert-Jules, who worked so hard to make this workshop a reality and who should have been with us – only if. We all experienced a feeling of shock and loss once we heard about this tragic event. We are with you in your time of grief.

For many of us, this is the first time to visit St Lucia, and we hope it will not be the last. Let me confide with you that this is the third time since early February this year that I have participated, in my capacity as Chair of SBI, in a climate change-related meeting in a small island developing country – first in Jamaica and then in Cook Islands for adaptation and now here on Article 6. Three beautiful islands, albeit with their own particularities and challenges, and yet sharing the same vulnerability to climate change – as the other 50 SIDS and territories spread over the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Oceans and Caribbean Sea.

I doubt I need to delve into the details of such issues as the provisions of Article 6 of the Convention, the New Delhi Work Programme on the Article, the political or legal background for this workshop, or even the purposes and objectives of the workshop. They are all known to you. You all know from A to Z of it, and will hear more from other colleagues.

What, instead, I try to bring to your kind attention in this rather brief statement is to highlight the significance of the juncture, and hence, the imperative of action and progress.

Meeting here in early July we are only a few months away from the Conference of Parties that will meet in Bali end of this year, where the multilateral process on climate change will have to make a number of critical decisions. On the way to Bali, in 2007, we have already seen the Stern Report and IPCC 4th Assessment Report. They have driven home, in more definitive words and terms, the message that climate change is already with us and also that commensurate policies and actions are needed on a global scale. And just recently we have seen the Report of the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. It brings into focus the particular challenges these groups of countries face in this regard.

Recent G-8 Summit in Germany bore witness to the fact that the community of industrialized countries – inclusive of the United States – seem to have come to a general understanding, perhaps at long last, that climate change is a fact of life, and quite a serious and ominous one at that. The Summit's outcome, far from being perfect or ideal, does nevertheless contain the positive element of recognition of the facts on the ground as well as of the imperative that the multilateral climate change process really needs to move forward. This is a welcome development, especially on the way to Bali, and particularly in so far as the post-2012 regime is concerned. In the words of Yvo de Boer, the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC: "The impacts of climate change we are presently seeing in the Caribbean underscore the urgency to act against the phenomenon by launching an agenda for negotiations on a post-2012 agreement in Bali this year. The negotiations need to conclude by 2009 so that the agreement can be ratified by governments before the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012."

Looking to the future – to the unfolding multilateral negotiating process in which each and every State Party, big and small, developed and developing, Annex I and non-Annex I, will have a role to play according to their respective capacity and circumstances – there is little doubt – if any at all – that education, training and public awareness will assume an ever-greater role in the process. It is now almost common knowledge that the success of the climate change process – as is the case with any other multilateral process – depends, in the final analysis, on the active and meaningful participation of the wide range of stakeholders involved – public and private sectors as well as the wide range of civil society actors. It is here that the role of education and outreach becomes all the more critical, and in fact, indispensable.

With these words of a general – and if you may, bird's eye view - nature, let me now just turn to the business at hand; our three-day workshop here in St. Lucia. Given the event's purposes and objectives, and what lies ahead of us in Bali, including the general review of the New Delhi Work Programme, I believe we need a very practical, result-oriented approach. Our discussions should help facilitate sharing of experiences and best practices on education, training and public awareness activities and help identify concrete and specific priorities for island States over the next five years. We would be well advised to try to come up with well-thought out options that are realistic and timely so that the outcome could help all of us in Bali with the designing and articulation of the expected new framework for action. Equally important is the workshop's endeavour towards producing some practical ideas on effective promotion of international cooperation – the buzz word being "partnerships".

In closing, Dear Colleagues, let me just reiterate, once more, that I am looking forward to a fruitful discussion over the next three days, and to practical outcomes that can benefit the particular concerns and interests of the SIDS as well as the implementation of the Article 6 of the Convention. I stop here and thank all of you, for your kind attention and indulgence.