

FEATURE ADDRESS

Delivered by Honourable Leonard Montoute
Acting Prime Minister of Saint Lucia
at the Opening Ceremony of the
United Nations Climate Change Article 6 Workshop for Small Island
Developing States
Bay Gardens Hotel, Rodney Bay, Saint Lucia
3rd-5th July 2007

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Economic Planning and National Development

Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Physical Development, Mr. George James; Your Excellency, Ambassador Bagher Asadi, Chairman of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Representatives of the UNFCCC; Representative of the United Nations Environment Programme; Members of the National Climate Change Committee; Distinguished guests; Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured, and pleased, to address you this morning. Let me first welcome you, on behalf of the Government and People of Saint Lucia, to our beautiful island. In particular, I wish to convey the best wishes of our Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Sir John Compton.

It is our hope that you will have a chance to enjoy the natural beauty around you and to sample the cuisine and culture that make us what we are. I also hope, that in inviting you to do so, I will have fulfilled the expectations of the Minister of Tourism with respect to marketing Saint Lucia as a tourist destination.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, Saint Lucia, early on, recognized the potential of climate change to affect the lives of all on this planet. Indeed, as far back as the early 1990's, Saint Lucia was part of the nascent Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) which coalesced around the climate change issue and which today has a membership of over 40 countries. In addition, Saint Lucia was one of the early signatories of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Since the entry into force of the Convention in 1994, Saint Lucia has played an active part in the negotiations aimed at forging a global alliance to

address climate change. The same can be said with respect to the Kyoto Protocol, which came into force in 2005.

Saint Lucia has much to lose, should climate change be allowed to progress unabated. Vulnerability assessments conducted for the island to date point to, among others, declining water supply, beach erosion, increased hurricane damage, increased occurrence of vector-borne diseases and negative impacts on tourism, fisheries and agriculture.

The negative consequences projected for Saint Lucia are not unique to us. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the respected global scientific body on this phenomenon has recognized the particular vulnerability of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) with respect to climate change. Indeed, some low-lying islands and coastal states fear submergence of much or all of their land area with the onset of sea level rise.

I say all of this to underscore the fact that Saint Lucia recognizes, that as a small island nation, is not in this alone in the battle against climate change. As such, we have endeavoured, at every opportunity, to work with our island brothers and sisters, through AOSIS and other means, to ensure that we have a realistic chance to pursue our goal of sustainable development.

Today, we hear, from certain quarters, calls for the global community to stabilize global warming at 2 degrees Celsius above the baseline. This may be convenient for many industrialized countries, but it is certainly not in the best interest of SIDS as, at that temperature, we would see, not only the extensive bleaching and death of coral reefs, but also the actual disappearance of several island states, precipitated by sea level rise.

There is no question that climate change must be tackled with the utmost urgency if the inhabitants of this “Green Planet” are to have a meaningful chance for long-survival. However, according to the experts, mankind already possesses much of the technology required to address the problem. For example, with regard to mitigating the production of the greenhouse gases that cause climate change, much progress has been made in the advancement of renewable forms of energy. With respect to adapting to the impacts of climate change, there is increasing attention on developing appropriate engineering, ecological and socio-economic measures. While there is clearly still much to be done in either case, we are clearly not starting from scratch.

Notwithstanding, the existence of the technology to combat climate change, is clearly not sufficient. At the global, regional and national levels, there is need for the political will to do what we know is necessary, and I daresay, just. The nations of this world, particularly the industrialized ones, must take responsibility for their greenhouse gas emissions, and the consequences thereof.

In addition to political will and responsibility, there is also a need for the allocation of adequate financial resources and for the equitable diffusion of the available technologies. Incidentally, we must remember, where money is concerned, that expert studies to date have endorsed the old proverb that “a stitch in time saves nine”. In other words, they have concluded that it would be cheaper for mankind to slow down climate change than to pay for its impacts in the long term.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, having said all this, we will be unable to make meaningful progress, on the climate change front, unless people all over the world are fully aware and adequately knowledgeable of the causes and consequences of this phenomenon. We will not make progress unless people are made to understand that they can take meaningful action, on an individual and collective basis, to address climate change. We will not be successful until people at all levels are equipped with the skills necessary to take the required actions.

Article 6 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change addresses Education, Training and Public Awareness. Because emphasis was at first placed on the more “technical” aspects of the Convention, we began to see progress on Article 6 only after several Conferences of the Parties or COPs. Indeed, it was only at COP-8 in New Delhi, in 2002, that a coherent work programme for Article 6 was adopted. Notwithstanding, there is a widely-held view that more financial resources need to be allocated in this direction.

Saint Lucia, along with the rest of the Caribbean, has long recognized the value of education, training and public awareness as a critical part of our climate change effort. Saint Lucia has identified an Article 6 Contact Point and has played a very active part in the relevant negotiations over the years. The National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, adopted some years ago, underscores the importance of an educated public. In addition, under

successive regional projects, Saint Lucia and other CARICOM countries have undertaken baseline assessments of public awareness and developed outreach strategies. For example, a survey undertaken in Saint Lucia in 2006 revealed that while the majority of persons were aware of climate change, many were not fully knowledgeable of the extent of its impact on their lives or of the response measures they could take.

Armed with this knowledge, we have begun to intensify efforts to bring about the requisite changes. For example, the Sustainable Development & Environment Section has recently published a brochure on climate change tips. The Section is also finalizing a toolkit for primary and secondary school teachers as well as a video documentary that discusses climate change from a Saint Lucian perspective. All of these products have been made possible with the assistance of the United Nations Environment Programme and at this time, I wish to express gratitude to UNEP for its kind support.

I have been reliably informed that this workshop is the last in a series of regional forums addressing Article 6 of the Convention. The fact that it is taking place is testimony to the persistence of AOSIS countries participating in the Convention process in calling for a workshop to address their needs in this regard. It is also happening due to the support of the Climate Change secretariat and to the financial assistance provided by UNEP and the Government of Norway, for which we are grateful.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, small island nations possess a unique combination of vulnerabilities imposed by, among others, physical size, population and geographic location. Conversely, some of these very factors have contributed to what has become a unique, “island” way of doing things that permeates even the way we communicate, and share information and knowledge, with each other. As such, this workshop, which will facilitate the sharing of experiences and the exchange of views by Article 6 practitioners from Small Island Developing States, is well justified. It is my hope that the proceedings of the workshop, which we look forward to receiving, will contribute in a meaningful way to future deliberations on Article 6, by the Conference of Parties.

I wish to thank all those who have made this workshop a reality. In particular, I must thank the United Nations Climate Change secretariat for agreeing to convene this workshop here in Saint Lucia and ask you, the representatives of the secretariat, to convey our best wishes to the Executive

Secretary Mr. Yvo de Boer. When you do so, however, please let him know what he missed.

I must also acknowledge the hard work of the Sustainable Development Section of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and other Government agencies. Planning an event such as this is never easy and those persons who put in the required effort must be commended accordingly.

At this juncture, all that remains is for me to wish you successful deliberations and an enjoyable stay in Saint Lucia.

I thank you.