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News

Islands want insurance support for climate change fall-out

PETRE WILLIAMS, Senior staff reporter
Tuesday, February 13, 2007

INSURANCE support from developed countries for small island states impacted by natural disasters linked to climate change, were among the key considerations of a three-day workshop that ended in Kingston last week.

This is so according to Dr Roberto Acosta, coordinator of the Adaptation, Science and Technology Programme of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which recently hosted a workshop at the Hilton Kingston Hotel. The Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nation's Environment Programme (UNEP) collaborated on the effort.

"A very positive outcome of the workshop was the discussion on matters of how insurance can contribute to deal with the people more affected by the negative impacts of climate change, taking into account the limits of commercial insurance and considering the possibility that the international community discusses some kind of support for insurance to facilitate the adaptation capacity of the population (of SIDS)," Acosta told the Observer last Wednesday.

Local Government and Environment Minister Dean Peart supported the suggestion, noting that there was no doubt of the benefit it would provide to SIDS, such as Jamaica, when they are affected by hurricanes such as Ivan.

"That would be a good move," the minister said when

contacted last Thursday.

The UNFCCC workshop, meanwhile, attracted the participation of an estimated 50 participants from SIDS - among them Barbados, the Bahamas, Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago and St Lucia - as well as representatives from a number of first world countries, including Britain, the United States (US) and France.

The need for greater collaboration among SIDS to enhance their ability to adapt to climate change was also among the key issues discussed at the workshop.

"The Caribbean has a good scientific basis, but will benefit from support to continue the assessment with more resources and some support with strengthening the networking among the scientists and technical people from the islands. They need to increase the collaboration, of course with the contribution of the north," noted Acosta.

Also identified as important to ensuring the ability of SIDS to treat with climate change is to have adaptation measures forming part of their respective national development plans and policies.

"Actions taken to avoid the negative impacts of climate change (should) be integrated in the national development plan and not isolated because it will not have the same effectiveness," said Acosta.

He added that the workshop was very timely, having regard to the recently concluded meeting of the intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC), which discussed the science of climate change.

"It was demonstrated that global warming was the consequence of human activity and there were good forecasts of the very adverse impacts from global warming," the UNFCCC representative said.

The IPCC, subsequent to its meeting, released a report indicating that the world faced an average rise in temperature of three degrees Celsius this century if greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide and methane, continue to rise at their current pace and are allowed to double from their pre-industrial level, according to information from the UNFCCC's website.

The report noted further that the warming over the last century was 0.74 degrees Celsius, with most of it occurring

during the past 50 years. Warming for the next 20 years, meanwhile, is expected to be 0.2 degrees Celsius.

Against this background, executive secretary of the UNFCCC, Yvo de Boer, has called for immediate action to limit the negative effects of climate change. Those effects include, among other things, rising sea levels and the potential for the extensive loss of life and property in countries, especially SIDS, that are affected by the increasingly perilous changes in the weather.

"It is politically significant that all the governments have agreed to the conclusions of the scientists, making this assessment a solid foundation for sound decision making," de Boer said in a release to the media that is posted on the UNFCCC's website.

"The world urgently needs new international agreement on stronger emission caps for industrialised countries, incentives for developing countries to limit their emissions, and support for robust adaptation measures," he added.

It is with this end in mind that the UNFCCC hosted the workshop in Jamaica this week, with a view to take on board the issues of SIDS as they seek to adapt to climate change and the challenges it presents.

"One issue is clear: the climate is changing and apparently it is a consequence of human intervention. Therefore, it is important that countries take measures to adapt to climate change. At the same time, countries that are the cause of this problem should take more drastic measures to reduce emissions," Acosta said.

"This is why we have the meeting here in Jamaica with all the small islands developing states of the Caribbean to discuss what can be done in order to improve the capacity of this country (and others and to find out) what issues should provide the signs to policy makers to be more active in facing the negative impacts of climate change," he added.

A second workshop is to be held in the Cook Islands with the developing states of the Pacific islands in another few weeks. The workshops come ahead of the next UNFCCC talks and negotiations to be held in May in Bonn, Germany, which succeed the December climate change conference.

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