



**Lecture: “Is anything being done on climate change?”  
Central Bank of Barbados  
Church Village, Bridgetown, Barbados  
8 October 2012**

**Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary  
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

H.E. Maxine McClean, Minister of Foreign Affairs,  
Permanent Secretaries,  
Resident Representative of UNDP,  
Dear friends,

I have only been in Barbados for 48 hours but I already know what happens when you ask for directions. For those of you who are visiting Barbados, let me illustrate. It goes like this: “Just keeping down until you get to the fork in the road. There you make a left and the second house on the right is a blue house with a white gate. Not there!” When requesting further guidance, it comes: “You are on the right road. Now just make sure you count the large breadfruit trees, and make a left after the third breadfruit tree. You will see a green house with a blue gate. Not there!”

It strikes me that when you live on a beautiful island such as Barbados, climate change itself is a “not there” topic. We would prefer not to even walk down that path because the challenge is so overwhelming. But the fact is we must walk down that path.

Tonight, I would like to share three messages with you:

1. Climate change is happening, here and now.
2. The world is doing something about it, not enough, but we are walking in the right direction.
3. Much more can be done at the national level for reasons of domestic interest.

So let me start this evening with the sobering news.

There is no doubt that current climate modelling has underestimated both the speed and the scale of potential impacts of climate change.

Just in the last few weeks, scientists themselves have been surprised to see the Arctic ice receding to its lowest point ever, shrinking by 186,000 square miles

compared to only five years ago. Arctic melt has an effect on the ocean currents that circulate the globe.

In January of this year, I visited Antarctica, at the other extreme of the globe. Huge glaciers are breaking off from the western land-based ice shelf and melting faster than predicted. And what happens in Antarctica does not stay in Antarctica, because that additional water is one of the main causes for rising sea levels, so painfully felt by small low-lying island States.

The vulnerability of Barbados to climate change is well known. In addition to sea level rise and storm surges that impact tourism resources, the projected changes in temperature and rainfall threaten to exert pressure on foreign reserves as agricultural imports, already high, increase further to address expected future local shortfalls. I saw yesterday that this is an island blessed with crystalline groundwater resources, but future water scarcity makes today's groundwater protection an urgent imperative.

So let us agree that climate change is not a scientific hypothesis. Climate change is a very real threat today and a potential nightmare tomorrow. Just think of hundreds of millions of people who may have to migrate from low-lying coastal areas due to loss of land, or from Sub-Saharan Africa due to loss of water and food. Climate migration may in fact become the most pressing humanitarian challenge of all times.

*So, is anything being done to address climate change?*

Well here the news is more hopeful.

### ***Global Progress***

I am sure many of you feel the international negotiation process is crawling along slower than an African snail in Barbados but actually, the international effort under the UN to construct an adequate and comprehensive response to climate change has advanced more in the past two years than in the past ten.

In Cancun and Durban, governments set a clear course for a low carbon future by agreeing that they will keep the temperature rise to below 2 degrees centigrade, with a view to revising this target to 1.5 degrees, the only maximum temperature rise that guarantees the survival of the most vulnerable.

They know that this requires concerted and urgent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. So they have taken several steps in that direction:

They have agreed to a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, under which industrialized countries must continue to take the lead in legally binding emission reductions. But the Kyoto Protocol only covers 10–12% of global emissions, and this is clearly insufficient.

So in addition, all industrialised countries, and 49 developing nations have made pledges/plans to cut emissions. These pledges cover 80% of global emissions, but are not internationally binding.

Furthermore, governments recognize that even if they did comply with the full scale of the pledged reductions they would amount to only 60% of what is needed to keep the temperature rise to below 2 degrees, let alone 1.5 degrees.

- So they have also agreed to negotiate by 2015 a legally-based framework to cover all countries from 2020;
- They have agreed to consider how to raise their ambition to cover the gap before 2020; and
- They have agreed to a science-based reality check on progress, starting in 2013.

The other essential component of the global efforts is a new international infrastructure to:

- channel technology to developing nations
- bring greater focus and efficiency to adaptation efforts
- most importantly - raise and channel the finance for adaptation and mitigation by
  - launching the Green Climate Fund as a dedicated channel for climate finance, and
  - ramping up fund flows to US\$100 billion per year by 2020

I expect decisions and implementation on all of the above to be pushed forward in Doha this November.

In summary, the world IS putting together a system where international and national policies and business strategies continually strengthen each other for everyone's benefit.

### ***Barbados***

Now the question is: how does this benefit Barbados?

Here the news is also positive.

The emerging system of action to deal with climate change offers not only a solution to climate change ...but a fast track to sustainability away from an old economic model that is failing us anyway.

The times when we took our natural resources for granted, assuming they would always be there, are over. Our challenge now is to invest in the protection of our natural capital in such a way that it makes economic sense, and can function as a driver for growth.

A country as dependent on beach tourism as Barbados needs to protect its beaches as the sources of important income. Yesterday I had the pleasure of seeing how Barbados has become a world leader in climate resilient coastal development, successfully integrating disaster risk reduction along the coastal areas with climate change adaptation, in a way in which it is a driver for economic growth. Who here has walked down the Richard Haynes Boardwalk? Maybe you thought it was just a

local beautification project (because it is beautiful!). Well I hope I don't spoil the romanticism of the boardwalk by telling you that it is a prime example of the use of science to protect nature and contribute to economic prosperity.

Barbados is recognized around the world for its leadership in innovative adaptation. So let me point out the next opportunity on the horizon.

The next opportunity is investment in RENEWABLE ENERGY. Let me explain.

Barbados has two major economic challenges right now:

- achieve robust economic growth; and
- maintain stable fiscal conditions over the medium-term.

These challenges are exacerbated by the fact that Barbados' energy sector is highly dependent on imported fossil fuels, the price of which is usually high and always volatile. Just to give you a sense of the burden of this on the economy, the cost of oil imports is currently USD 2.6 billion per annum, equivalent to 6 per cent of GDP, the same amount Barbados spends on education.

The good news here is that the high dependency of Barbados on fossil fuels is simply no longer necessary, and I am encouraged to see that the policy corner has already been turned and Barbados is taking a lead among other island states.

At a regional level, Barbados was a key force behind the Barbados Declaration, under which 52 SIDS have taken a collective target to cut emissions by 45% over the next 18 years

Barbados has signed the SIDS Dock initiative of AOSIS which seeks to provide a collective institutional mechanism to:

- help generate financial resources to address adaptation to climate change
- mobilize resources to transform national energy sectors

At the national level, Barbados adopted a climate policy this year.

- Today 15% of energy generation in Barbados is renewable, largely due to the prevalent solar water heaters. The target is to increase the presence of RE in the energy mix to 29% over the next 20 years, based on wind, biomass, waste and solar, and perhaps even ocean thermal.
- This would cut electricity costs by US\$280 million
- The plan also calls for a 22% reduction in electricity consumption via higher EE, further reducing the electric bill to consumers.

While it is estimated that these measures would avoid 4.5 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> being emitted, the compelling reason to pursue such steps is to reduce the import of bunker fuel by 30%, substantially improving the balance of trade and the fiscal debt.

So here is the golden nugget of my address today:

As we move down the path of the response to climate change, we increasingly realize that addressing the global problem actually means implementing national policies and measures, be they for adaptation or emission reduction, that primarily have a direct benefit at the domestic level.

### *Conclusion*

Dear friends, let me summarize.

The world is progressing but it is not yet doing enough to cut the greenhouse gases which are causing climate change, and SIDS remain at the front line of impacts. I'm personally disappointed that developed countries are not moving faster, and they will have to do so. But gradually, inexorably, the story of climate change is changing for developing nations.

Not long ago, talk about SIDS and climate change was only about vulnerability and impacts. Those have not disappeared and will increase. But alongside them, what is appearing are the opportunities to use the momentum of the global response to climate change to promote national solutions to long standing problems.

I congratulate Barbados for the leadership it is showing, and I challenge Barbados to further implement solutions for both adaptation and mitigation, to lead the way in the Caribbean and beyond.

The history of how we addressed climate change is currently being written, and you, the people of Barbados, are writing an important chapter.

Keep writing, keep solving, keep leading.

Thank you.

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