

Statement by the H.E. Mrs. Joy Creese, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Housing and the Environment at the Durban United Nations Climate Change Conference High-Level Segment, Durban, South Africa, December 8, 2011.

Thank you Mr. President.

Through you, I extend appreciation to the Government and people of South Africa and the beautiful City of Durban for their gracious hospitality and excellent facilities and organization provided for this conference.

It has now become an established fact that climate change is the single environmental issue of the 21st century, that poses unprecedented threat to mankind and one which will undermine sustainable development efforts, reduction of poverty and sustained economic growth if urgent action is not taken immediately. Trinidad and Tobago is presented with the growing challenges of developing sustainably while ensuring economic growth. As an oil and gas producer with a still growing industrial sector we find ourselves in a unique position being also a small island developing state. Mitigation and adaptation are, therefore, of equal concern to us, being particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago acknowledges that all countries that are ratified signatories to the UNFCCC have a legally binding responsibility to contribute to achieving the objective of the UNFCCC, regardless of the quantum of their greenhouse gas emissions. Trinidad and Tobago is committed to contributing to this objective. We do not however, subscribe to the use of socio-economic metrics as any basis for defining the obligations of countries to reduce their emissions. We believe that equity issues need to be defined not on any notion of polluting space, which is antithetical to the issue we are striving to address, but on the rights of all countries to develop sustainably and not at the expense of others. It is therefore crucial that the multilateral process defined under the UNFCCC be maintained and strengthened, while at the same time adhering to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capability.

Mr. President, Honoured delegates, Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to being responsible member of the global community and recognizes the need to take domestic action from both a mitigation and adaptation perspective. In this context, our Government has approved a National Climate Change Policy and we are well on the way to developing strategies and approaches to address our greenhouse gas emissions. Our goal is to define an ambitious yet practically feasible and achievable greenhouse gas emissions reduction objective in the near future. Let me state unequivocally that we are of the firm conviction that every country has to play its part to address climate change and we are playing ours.

Trinidad and Tobago already uses clean natural gas and efficient combined cycle generating technology for its power generation. We are therefore at the edge of clean fuel technology. Notwithstanding, we have put in place relevant policy and strategies that would realise the increased use of renewable energy through the installation of solar street lights and traffic lights on new highways and the replacement of existing ones. We are now converting our state-owned vehicles to operate on compressed natural gas and exploring the use of electric buses on dedicated routes. Trinidad and Tobago is also developing a green government policy which will aim to increase energy efficiency in government buildings and the use of renewable energy in government housing projects. At the same time adaptation remains a major concern and our relevant sectoral policies are being revised to integrate climate change and build climate resilience.

Mr. President the Government of Trinidad and Tobago recognises therefore that there is opportunity in the face of adversity. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions while at the same time alleviating poverty, raising the standards and quality of life for our citizens and creating jobs and economic growth are not necessarily mutually exclusive. We are determined to demonstrate this as we develop a low carbon economic growth path.

Mr. President the efforts of any one country or any group of countries alone cannot save the planet. In this regard, it is important for every single one of us that Durban achieves a

commitment to strive for emission cuts that would lead to global warming of no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius. The main challenge in Durban will not only be to operationalize the Cancun decisions and commence concrete action, but also to send a strong signal to the world, that our leaders are serious about this issue and make a firm commitment to strive for a legally binding agreement in the near future. The Durban package will, therefore, need to achieve the following:

- a) Operationalisation of the new institutions in the process, particularly the Green Climate Fund.
- b) Immediate action on reducing emissions from deforestation, and the provision of financial resources;
- c) Agreement on meaningful mitigation actions by all countries, keeping in mind that developed countries need to provide the proactive leadership required;

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago recognizes also, that in spite of this urgency, there is no quick fix to this global problem. Our Government is fully cognizant of the political and economic realities facing the world, and the need for putting in place as soon as possible, practical approaches within this framework, without compromising the interests of vulnerable countries such as small island developing states. This will ensure measurable progress and minimize risks. I must point out that the countries that contribute the least to endangering the planet are among those that are affected the most. As we discuss and debate the global plan for sustainability, let us also remember the vulnerability of so many affected less developed and developing states.

Indeed, the current imperative is absolutely clear. We have the incontrovertible responsibility as the guardians of this generation to ensure that we protect the future generations. We must fully commit now and pledge to leave our precious planet in a better state than that which we inherited. We must act now as procrastination is the thief of time, and we have so little time to act. Urgency is therefore key.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, Trinidad and Tobago is convinced that sufficient political will exists to achieve this end and we will be working constructively with like-minded states to ensure that Durban achieves the outcome that would send the reassuring and comforting signals to an expectant world that we as leaders are doing something about the climate for our future generations.

I Thank You