

**STATEMENT BY
THE HONORABLE
H. ELIZABETH THOMPSON
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT OF BARBADOS ON BEHALF
OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY
(CARICOM)
TO THE THIRD CONFERENCE OF PARTIES
OF THE UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE
CHANGE, KYOTO, JAPAN
DECEMBER 8, 1997**

Mr. President, it is a great honor for me to address this the Third Conference of the Parties on behalf of my country, Barbados and the following members of the Caribbean Community, Antigua and Barbuda, The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

There is no longer any doubt among members of the scientific community that the changes in the earth's climate and the consequent rise in the sea level is largely man induced. Mr. President, we have come to Kyoto to decide on the future of the planet for the problem of global warming threatens our very existence. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, (IPCC) has noted that the earth is warming at a faster rate than at any time during the last 10,000 years. Those countries which are the greatest emitters must reach consensus on limiting greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 levels and not seek to delay action until dates far in the future.

Small island developing states which emit less than 0.01% of the greenhouse gases are already experiencing the adverse impacts of global warming and sea level rise. The Second Assessment Report of the IPCC states inter alia that a 50-centimetre rise in the world's oceans would double the number of people now at risk from flooding, from 46 million to 92 million per year. We, the countries of CARICOM are among those most vulnerable and at highest risk – all are islands or low-lying coastal states. On the present trend, the sea level rise predicted by the global scientific community, if significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by the developed countries are not made, will have disastrous effects on our countries, economies and peoples.

This conclusion is a terrifying prognosis for us. CARICOM countries depend heavily on our coastal resources. Our reefs provide the habitats for many species of marine flora and fauna. They also

protect our coastlines from wave action. Even a small temperature variation of 2 degrees would destroy our reefs, alter the habitats of many species and cause substantial coastal erosion. Tourism is the dominant income generator for the Caribbean countries. A rise in the sea levels would immediately jeopardize the viability and long term sustainability of this important industry.

The region already suffers heavily from the high incidence of tropical cyclones. Rising sea levels coupled with the anticipated increases in the frequency and intensity of these cyclones as a result of global warming would effectively devastate most, if not all of our vital infrastructure and threaten the lives of a majority of our population. The reality is that on small islands such as ours there is nowhere to run, no way to escape. In many cases whole islands would no longer be viable, some may cease to exist altogether as a direct result of global warming.

The CARICOM states are committed to the limitation of greenhouse gas emissions. We are pursuing programs for the utilization of renewable energy, particularly solar and wind energy. There are also programs for the efficient use of non-renewable fuels. The Caribbean region is also implementing the Caribbean Planning for Adaptation to Climate Change Project, which will ensure that reliable data for further mitigation and adaptation mechanisms are available.

The countries that are the greatest emitters of greenhouse gases must show leadership and commitment in resolving the problems that they have caused and which the world now faces. The CARICOM states are in total agreement that there should be no new commitments for developing countries as stated in the Berlin Mandate and reaffirmed in Geneva at the second Conference of the Parties. As members of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) we will unequivocally support a protocol, free of loopholes which has effective legally binding commitments for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Although we prefer an approach that involves all gases, in the interest of reaching a successful conclusion we are willing to consider a basket consisting of the three main gases, namely Carbon Dioxide, Methane and Nitrous Oxide and a commitment to reduce the emissions of the long lived gases in the shortest possible time.

If Annex One countries do not honor their commitments made in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and reduce their emissions below 1990 levels by the year 2000, the small island developing states of the Caribbean the Pacific and the Indian Oceans will face a bleak future. In fact some of us

will have no future. We therefore welcome the statement by Vice President Gore on increased flexibility of the US negotiators. In our view the critical issue cannot be the selfish special interests of the world's largest polluters, but must focus on safeguarding the survival of those countries at greatest risk. Rather the critical issue is about ensuring that no more islands are inundated by seawater and consequently abandoned. It is about ensuring that the people who have only the coastlines left on which to live are not forced off the little land remaining to them. It is about ensuring that the cultures and economies of our Caribbean region remain viable for future generations. It is Mr. President, about the survival of the planet, its inhabitants and the future of all the world's people.

Let us therefore commit ourselves to urgent action to save our planet and all the people who live on it. We dare not fail.

Thank You

Mr President