



The Importance to SIDS of a Global Agreement on Climate Change

*by Maxine P.O. McClean**

There can be no doubt that the phenomenon of climate change and its adverse impacts present a clear and present danger to all SIDS, many of which, are located in the Caribbean. From the outset, the Caribbean has consistently maintained the position that the challenges confronting SIDS in the face of climate change are of an intrinsically existential nature. For SIDS, the mantra below “1.5 to stay alive” is simply a statement of the stark realities, both current and forecast, that global temperature and sea-level rises signify. Our physical survivability, our economic sustainability and, indeed, our very existence, are directly linked to the crafting of an ambitious global legally-binding framework that constrains global temperature increase and sea-level rise to tolerable levels. Such an agreement, predicated on the best available scientific evidence, is needed sooner rather than later. Time is simply not on our side.

While SIDS do not number among the net contributors to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that are the scientifically-proven catalyst of climate change, they are among those countries most vulnerable to its effects. This notwithstanding, SIDS have not adopted a passive approach to finding and applying solutions to the problem. On the contrary, we have been shouldering our share of the burden insofar as it is practical to do so and taking fully into account the principle of common, but differentiated, responsibilities and respective capabilities. In Barbados, for example, we have embarked on a renewable energy policy founded on the principles of the Green Economy, with linkages to the Blue Economy, that demonstrates our commitment, at the national level, to a more sustainable economic model as well as taking up the challenge of combatting climate change. At the regional level, the inauguration, in August of this year, of the Caribbean Centre for Renewal Energy and Energy Efficiency (CCREEE) is indicative of the seriousness with which the Caribbean views its role in the climate change arena.

Despite our own efforts, SIDS enthusiasm is sobered by the realization that our extremely narrow resource bases and limited human, technical and financial capacities simply cannot sustain the requisite level of intervention. What is required to underpin these home-grown efforts are scaled-up, additional and predictable support, spurred by our developed partners, at all levels of intervention – from mitigation to adaptation to technology transfer to capacity-building to loss and damage. There can be no escaping



the fact that unless the necessary finances are leveraged there can be no transition from stated ambition to effected action.

As signatories to the Kyoto Protocol, the Caribbean and its European Union (EU) partners have worked to maintain a vibrant partnership in the fight against climate change. The vitality of this partnership is underscored by the inclusion of dedicated chapters on approaches to environmental and climate change issues in various bi-regional cooperative framework documents. Among the most salient of these for the Caribbean SIDS are the Joint Caribbean-EU Partnership Strategy (JCEUS) formalized in 2012 and the Brussels Declaration and updated CELAC-EU Plan of Action both emanating from the Second CELAC-EU Summit of June 2015. The JCEUS identified climate change and its consequences as *“key obstacles to sustainable development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals”* (MDGs). Since then, the post-2015 development strategy has been elaborated to build on the MDGs and has given due recognition to the necessity of *“tak[ing] urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”* as enunciated in Goal 13 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The task before us may, at times, seem daunting. Much more daunting, however, will be the dire consequences that will flow from inaction. It is my firm belief that the political will not only can, but must, be mustered for the Paris COP21 to deliver on the as yet elusive goal of a legally-binding Agreement on Climate Change that will ensure that the preservation of our planet for present and future generations.

***Honourable Senator Maxine P.O. McClean** was invited to join the Cabinet of Prime Minister, the Honourable Mr. David Thompson, as a Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office in January 2008. On November 24, Senator McClean was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Trade. She is a graduate of University of the West Indies (UWI)- Cave Hill Campus and received her MBA and MA in International Affairs at Ohio University. She is former Lecturer of the Department of Management Studies at the UWI, where she taught for more than 17 years.

This paper was prepared for the EU-LAC Foundation’s Newsletter of December on the theme Climate Change This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the EU-LAC Foundation.