

**Barbados Statement at the  
Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction  
Kobe, Japan  
January 18 - 22, 2005**

Thank you, Mr. President.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

The Barbados Delegation wishes to thank the Government and People of Japan for their warm hospitality and excellent organization of this second World Conference on Disaster Reduction. We also wish to strongly commend the Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) for their tremendous and tireless work in preparing for this important event. This Conference could be of no greater relevance taking place less than one month following the unprecedented earthquake and tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean region; an event which ended a year characterised by a most active and devastating Atlantic hurricane season.

We take this opportunity to reiterate our deepest sympathies and compassion to those countries affected by the recent earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Barbados is acutely aware of the vulnerability of coastal communities and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to the impact of natural disasters, and in our own region, have recently felt the wrath and witnessed the devastating effects of Hurricane Ivan on Grenada and Hurricane Jeanne on Haiti.

These events have brought untold suffering to people in diverse places around the world, and underscores our vulnerability to the impact of a single event that can significantly alter or result in, the complete reversal of a country's development path. We therefore support the call for the implementation of

global early warning systems as reiterated by Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, in his Opening Statement at our Conference earlier this week.

Mr. President, Barbados strongly supports the Statement made by Mauritius on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). Following the adoption by the International Meeting on the 10 year Review of the Barbados Programme of Action for Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States of the Mauritius Strategy in Mauritius last week, it has become more critical than ever to address the issue of disaster risk reduction in a more holistic and integrated manner in the context of sustainable development.

Barbados had the privilege of hosting the First Conference on Small Island Developing States in 1994, which produced the Barbados Programme of Action highlighting the particular vulnerability of SIDS to natural and environmental disasters. That Conference took place immediately after the First World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction. It is significant that ten years later the timing of these processes is once again linked. The recently concluded Mauritius meeting on SIDS, reiterated the vulnerability of SIDS to natural and environmental disasters and made a number of significant recommendations for consideration by this World Conference. We strongly urge that the relevant outcomes of the Mauritius process be appropriately reflected in the outcomes of this Conference.

Disasters, such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, hurricanes and floods continue to undermine the Caribbean's efforts to attain sustainable development. We therefore call upon the international community to assist, not only in the immediate aftermath of a disaster by rendering relief and humanitarian support, but also in the medium and long term recovery phases which have a way of sometimes challenging our resolve to see the process through to a satisfactory conclusion. Support in human resource development,

institutional capacity building, and transfer of technology are key areas which will assist in making vulnerable states more self-reliant in the face of increasing frequency and severity of hazard impacts.

Mr. President, discussions on the issue of climate change as it relates to disaster risk reduction, have been the source of heated debate throughout this negotiating process. For us in the Caribbean, most disasters have a climate-related indicator and the potential impacts of Climate Change have the ability to increase in severity and frequency, the natural hazards that our SIDS already face. We have no doubt that our vulnerability to the impacts of natural hazards will certainly be exacerbated by the longer-term threat of climate change. The recognition of climate change adaptation planning and disaster planning and disaster mitigation is therefore crucial for us.

As you may be aware, many Small Island Developing States rely heavily on two important economic sectors: tourism and agriculture, as major foreign exchange earners. Both of these sectors are severely under threat from climate change impacts, including the impact of sea level rise on our coastal environment and changes in weather patterns, particularly relating to rainfall patterns of increased intensity and duration. For this reason, Mr. President, we place particular emphasis on the need for adaptation in these two sectors if our economic viability is to be assured.

Mr. President, we recognize that sustainable development is primarily a national responsibility, and we are committed to promoting sustainable development, eradicating poverty and improving the livelihoods of our people by implementing strategies, which build resilience and capacity to address our unique and particular vulnerabilities.

Mr. Chairman, an area of significant importance to the Government of Barbados, and Small Island Developing States, is the issue of the access to

affordable insurance to cover natural and environmental disasters. For us that has become all the more crucial as a result of increasing compensation costs following extreme weather related events which has resulted in insurance companies either withdrawing from the Caribbean or making it very costly to provide insurance and re-insurance to cover the related damage. We therefore wish that the outcome document of this meeting reflect specific actions in support of mechanisms that will provide feasible solutions for the peculiar conditions facing Small Island States.

At the national level, Barbados, like most of the countries in the English-speaking Caribbean, is making a concerted effort to widen the scope of disaster management by pursuing a national and regional Comprehensive Disaster Management, CDM Strategy. This CDM concept speaks holistically to the incorporation of disaster prevention and mitigation measures as an integral part of the disaster continuum. We acknowledge that it forms a foundational plank in the pursuit of national and regional sustainable development goals.

The Government of Barbados has adopted the CDM Strategy and is in the process of re-engineering the national disaster management organisation to meet the challenges of an expanded national mandate. The Barbados Emergency Management Agency, BEMA when fully established in the next six months, will be provided with a legal authority embodied for the first time in a Disaster Management Act, which will enable the Government to carry out risk reduction initiatives in an orderly and systematic manner. Facilities for the coordination of national, regional and international disaster management actions will be significantly modernised and enhanced to improve capacity before the start of the 2005 Hurricane Season. A National Disaster Plan will identify multiple hazards, adequate resources, and provide for the direct involvement of the public and private sectors, non-governmental organisations, international, regional and community based actors in disaster management.

Mr. Chairman, these bold initiatives being undertaken by the Government of Barbados clearly demonstrates that we are cognisant of the role we must play, both at national and regional levels in investing in disaster risk reduction. No more can we afford to sit idly by and allow our social and economic investments to be wiped out in a series of hazard impacts, notwithstanding the loss of life and human suffering, which ensues. We must demonstrate the political will and other capability to reduce vulnerability and guarantee greater security in the investments our people make.

As a small independent nation, Barbados will continue to work with international and regional donor partners and governments to strengthen regional disaster management mechanisms like the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, CDERA. We acknowledge the significant strides this Agency has made in the last decade to greatly improve the disaster management capability of its Members States as well as the wider non-English speaking Caribbean.

Our successes in regional cooperation and coordination are a model worth emulating. We therefore stand ready to share our experiences and expertise with other regions of the world. We sincerely appreciate the support of other governments, donor agencies and other partners in our efforts at reducing vulnerability and managing risks. We will continue to support regional and international initiatives, which seek to highlight the vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States and we call for a concerted global approach to tackling the challenges of disaster loss reduction and management.

We look forward to a successful conclusion of the Programme Outcome document, and more importantly to the implementation of the recommendations, which should set us on a sure path to achieving Sustainable Development and a safer world for our people.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you.