

STATEMENT
BY
HONOURABLE DEAN PEART
MINISTER OF LAND &
ENVIRONMENT
AT THE WORLD CONFERENCE
ON
DISASTER REDUCTION
KOBE, JAPAN

Mr. Chairman,

Salutation,

Jamaica wishes to thank the United Nations for its foresight in convening this important conference and the Government and people of Japan for being such excellent hosts.

We in the Caribbean over the last five (5) years or so have seen a clear trend for a greater than normal number of storms with somewhat of an increasing intensity. Along with this increasing frequency, we have also noted that in each of the last five (5) years, there has been an occurrence of an event of a record breaking nature. In 1999 for example, the Caribbean basin saw the first hurricane that move from west to east – an unusual occurrence. Although not many of these storms actually make landfall, Jamaica has been consistently affected by flooding from rains associated with these storms, resulting in loss of

lives, property, productive capacity and damage to infrastructure.

It is now a well-known fact that the powerful category four (4) Hurricane Ivan caused serious devastation in the Caribbean, including Jamaica, its center passing within 30km of our Southern Coast. Fourteen percent (14%) of the population or nearly 370,000 persons were directly affected, and total damages and loss amounted to some eight percent (8%) of our gross domestic product (GDP). Even worse than Jamaica is the devastation wreaked on Grenada, which has over ninety percent (90%) of its housing stock affected.

The increasing frequency and intensity of hurricanes in the Caribbean in recent times warrants a more concerted effort on our part to deal with mitigation and preparation. Simply put, preparation and mitigation must become a way of life for citizens, and a permanent part of the development planning and

approval processes. We recognize however, that even with the greatest preparation and attention to mitigation, hurricanes will strike, and we must deal with the matter of disaster relief. It is distressing to see the helplessness of States, especially poorer nations, to provide basic relief to its citizens in the aftermath of natural disasters. The truth is, the sheer magnitude of the effects of disasters in recent times has overwhelmed the capacity of states to help the victims expeditiously and adequately. The time has clearly come for the world community of nations to consider the establishment of some global disaster funding mechanism, which triggers immediately a disaster strikes, and provide more immediate and secure relief to victims when they need it most. This conference would perhaps be a good place to begin discussion of the nature and modality of such a fund.

Mr. Chairman, it would have been impossible to end this address without reference to recent Tsunami disaster, which affected so many nations in the

Indian Ocean. Jamaica wishes to express its sincere condolences to those countries affected by the tragic earthquake and its attendant tsunami. Naturally, we in the Caribbean, and Jamaica in particular, have been focusing our attention to the examination of possible Tsunami threats to us. It has been established that there is a need to further study the risk posed to Jamaica and the region, and on that basis establish a Caribbean wide warning system. There is currently a system covering Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, on which a Caribbean wide system could be built. In this context, this conference provides an excellent opportunity for sharing of experiences.

We would like to emphasize that while an early warning system is desirable, we must also intensify our efforts at public education, so that preparation and mitigation become a way of life for all our people.