

Statement by Senator, the Honourable Marcus Bethel, Minister of Health,

Commonwealth of The Bahamas

Commission on Sustainable Development

High Level Segment

Friday, 30 April 2004

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Colleagues, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

The Bahamas is particularly pleased to participate in this high-level segment of the Commission on Sustainable Development which is the first cycle in considering issues of critical concern to developing countries, water, sanitation and human settlements. For small island countries, such as mine, which depend on tourism, these areas of sustainable development become inextricably linked to the success of that industry. As we mark the tenth anniversary of the 1994 Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, we continue to underscore the importance of the Barbados Programme of Action on Sustainable Development for all Small Island Developing States as the essential blueprint for our aspirations in this area.

Mr. Chairman

Small Island Developing States are faced with myriad challenges due to their size, limited resources and remoteness. However, many of us endure an even greater challenge presented by our archipelagic nature. Development options for countries like ours are limited and create a greater burden in planning and implementing sustainable development objectives as set out in the Millennium Declaration. Goals such as increasing the number of people who are able to access safe drinking water and acquire basic sanitation by 2015 may seem unattainable but we must still strive to achieve these targets, because they are fundamental to the well-being of our people, and ultimately to our development as individual nations and as a global society.

For The Bahamas, the issues of sanitation is a critical one, Bahamians and visitors together generate more than 264,000 tons of municipal solid waste annually. The Government of The Bahamas, with assistance from the Inter-American Development Bank, is presently establishing proper sanitary landfills throughout the many Family Islands that make up The Commonwealth of The Bahamas. However, as is the case in many island tourist destinations the dumping of sewage and garbage from cruise and cargo ships remains of greatest concern to The Bahamas. In an effort to curtail such activities, the Government of The Bahamas has put in place strict legislations and it is our aim to impose heavy fines upon violators of these regulations. However, for a small country like The Bahamas, the difficulty of policing over 100,000 sq. miles of water can indeed be daunting.

In addition to ensuring that our waters are clean and safe, the Government of The Bahamas is also concerned with the disposal of waste. The predominant method for solid waste disposal in the country is by means of landfills. These landfills are generally not lined and continue to pose a great threat to ground water, the principle source of drinking water

for The Bahamas.

Mr. Chairman

Many of homes in The Bahamas are not tied to a central sewerage system and septic tanks which may discharge into the fresh water lens, predominate. The scope of this discharge is being closely monitored to prevent any adverse impact on the quality of water. However, the absence of a central sewerage system to handle liquid wastes requires light industrial and commercial establishments to utilize deep well injection for disposal. These wells are generally not well constructed, monitored or maintained and may also leak into the freshwater lens. This increasing threat to the quality of our water supply is of great concern and steps are being taken to speedily address this problem.

Mr. Chairman

In keeping with the statistics and information presented on these issues by the respective experts during this Twelfth Session of the CSD, my Government has undertaken legislative, financial and programmatic measures with a view to finding a viable solution to our waste disposal problems.

Given the wide variety of technological advancements in waste disposal experienced around the world, it is important to utilize that which is appropriate for environments such as The Bahamas. Although a programme to sewer all major settlements has been instituted in a number of islands, nonetheless, the significant land use and maintenance cost make such programmes uneconomic and adds a further financial burden to my Government.

As part of the Solid Waste Management Program, funded by the Inter-American Development Bank, both a municipal and a construction & demolition landfill cell were completed in 2000 for the island of New Providence, the Capital of The Bahamas and home to most of its citizens and tourists. Both cells are lined to protect the underlying water resources. Eleven (11) additional sanitary landfill sites are under construction in the Family Islands. However, as landfills are not a sustainable method for small islands countries with limited land space, alternative measures are being explored.

The Government of The Bahamas continues to review proposals for effective waste to energy programmes. Among those projects considered thus far, it is evident that the technological requirements for full implementation are inadequate and would not prove feasible for The Bahamas. Regional arrangements to share among developing countries, best practices in these areas ought to be established to ensure optimum benefit.

Small Island Developing States like The Bahamas will pursue the goal of achieving a sustainable environment for its people. We reiterate the need to promote access by Small Island Developing States to environmentally sound and energy-efficient technology for their sustainable development. The review within this session of the CSD on how we can improve in the areas of water, sanitation and human settlements is a step to move us forward. The Bahamas again calls for a renewed political commitment from the international community to

assist SIDS in their effort to face the challenges in these areas and meet the objectives of Agenda 21, the Millennium Declaration and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

I thank you.