

Bm/900/1/9 18

**Statement by**

**The Hon. Fred A. Mitchell,**

**Minister of Foreign Affairs  
of the  
Commonwealth of The Bahamas**

**Monday 2 September 2002**

**WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Johannesburg, South Africa  
2 –4 September 2002**

Mr. President, Excellencies.

I bring fraternal greetings on behalf of the Government and people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, whom I am honoured and privileged to represent at this forum. I wish to thank our generous hosts President Thabo Mbeki, the Government and people of South Africa for the many courtesies that they have extended to our delegation. We hope that in the not too distant future we may be able to return those courtesies to you, Mr. President, in our own country.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas is here primarily for two reasons. Firstly, we are here in solidarity with the lofty goals of this process, and to rededicate ourselves to the development of the earth without damage to our environment or causing further decline in the standard of living to the peoples of our global village. Our Bahamas National Trust has described it more aptly, as a commitment to "sustainable living." In this vein, we pay tribute to the important role of civil society and the NGO's and stress that their contribution to this process cannot be ignored.

Secondly, we are here to support our way of life, including our country's number one industry, tourism, a position we share with most of our Caribbean countries and other small island developing countries.

Mr. President,

People visit the Caribbean because of its environment: the natural beauty of the land, the sea and the marine life. They appreciate and enjoy the exchanges with our people and how we coexist with our environment. We cannot therefore, sit by idly and allow the environment to be destroyed, whether by our own actions, omissions or by the insensitivity of the international community to the way we live. The land and the sea sustain us; they are the medium for our biological survival and well-being and are essential to our development and prosperity. We cannot allow that very survival to be threatened.

For example, in recent multilateral discussions with the some of our developed partners, we stressed that, for us in The Bahamas, the threat of contamination from the carriage of spent nuclear fuel through our waters, is not just some vague theoretical possibility, but a real threat to our sustainable living and well-being that requires more than words but decisive, corrective action on their part.

Climate change and rising sea levels, in addition, are a reality, with 80 per cent of our land at less than 5 feet above mean sea level. Therefore, policies to lessen these threats and to assist with adaptation to climate change, take on some urgency.

Mr. President,

Since the Rio Conference, much has been done in The Bahamas to raise the awareness of the importance of a clean and healthy environment for the people of our country and for the visitors who come to our shores. The work of The Bahamas Environment, Science and Technology Commission has been stellar in establishing groundbreaking environmental activities throughout the country. It has been two-fold: keeping us abreast of the developments from Rio to now and keeping the world abreast of where we are. The Ministry of Tourism is a pioneer in the development of a set of sustainable tourism policy guidelines. The Sustainable Tourism Unit within the Ministry is the driving force in the implementation of these policies, in partnership with both public and private sectors.

Mr. President,

For Small Island Developing States like The Bahamas, the outcome of this World Summit is of critical importance for our sustainable development. It will determine how effective the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action will be in assisting our countries to overcome existing obstacles such as environmental degradation, managing social and economic vulnerabilities facing our countries and strengthening our capacity to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters. The Bahamas looks forward to actively participating in the international conference on the Review of the Barbados Programme of Action in 2004 and has expressed an interest in hosting one of the Preparatory Meetings .

Mr. President,

We have gathered here, in this Summit, to address a key issue facing the global community as a whole and to make decisions for the future. We have heard eloquent and compelling statements in the Debate. We now, must translate those words into action to address the potential threat of unsustainable environmental policies. We cannot, Mr. President, afford to permit our efforts to be frustrated. We must look back on this Johannesburg Summit not as an opportunity lost, but one that initiated ground-breaking solutions for the environment and development.

Mr. President,

We in The Bahamas, are convinced that sustainable living is the only way forward. Our political presence here today, signals my country's pledge to continue to reorient our national psyche and culture to embrace concern for the environment and human rights as integral to all public policy making. We take this message home as we leave this commitment to you.