



**PERMANENT MISSION OF JAMAICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

Remarks by

**Mrs. Diedre Mills
Deputy Permanent Representative**

**"Live to Tell" – Panel Discussion on the Occasion of the
2016 International Day for Disaster Reduction**

**New York
10th October 2016**

Excellences,
Distinguished Guests,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you on the Occasion of International Day for Disaster Reduction 2016, to explore approaches to increase awareness of strategies for disaster risk reduction.

Let me also express thanks to the Permanent Missions of Bangladesh and Switzerland to the United Nations, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for organizing this event and for the opportunity to share some of my country's experiences.

I also wish to use this opportunity to express condolences to Haiti, where the death toll now stands at approximately 1000 persons, following the passage of Hurricane Matthew, as well as the Bahamas, Cuba and the Southern States of the USA, which have also been impacted.

The launch of the Sendai Seven Campaign is a welcome initiative in this effort of awareness-raising not only in its thrust to mainstream the targets of the Sendai Framework but to advance their attainment over the next seven years.

Country Context

While Jamaica is not significantly challenged in the area of mortalities caused by disasters, our general policy on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) recognises that all disaster risk reduction and management strategies must work to prevent or minimise the potential for any such occurrence. This is integrally linked to both the SAMOA Pathway and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which underscore the importance of ensuring a safe and secure environment, where people can realise their full potential. We also recognise that healthy, productive and protective environments, social systems and economies are the bases of development, sustainability and human welfare.

From a global comparative perspective, Jamaica has on record very few numbers of mortalities resulting from disaster related events. Persons who suffer from disasters in Jamaica mostly experience injuries, displacement or significant loss in economic and infrastructural property. This is due in part to the relevant policies and programmes that have governed the country's hazard mitigation scheme since the 1990s, which have evolved in tandem with the relevant regional and international disaster risk reduction and management frameworks and processes.

DRR has been an issue of high priority for Jamaica as our location, geography and geology, as a small island developing state (SIDS), makes us prone to several natural hazards. As you may already be aware, Jamaica is especially vulnerable to not only hurricanes because of its location in the north Atlantic hurricane belt, but it is also within a seismically active zone which extends this vulnerability to earthquakes as well.

In addition to being a SIDS, Jamaica is also a Heavily Indebted Middle Income Country (HIMIC). As such, the society features several vulnerable groups, including children, youth-at risk, the elderly, persons with disabilities (PWDs), women and poor families. The list also includes both men and women living in rural communities, coastal zones and low-lying areas, people with poor housing and the homeless. It is estimated that persons at risk make up 60% of the total population and are generally vulnerable to storm surges, hurricanes and flooding, among other hazards. The higher level of poverty and increasing vulnerability to poverty of women are tied to their participation in the labour force typified by lower rates of employment and higher rates of unemployment in comparison to men.

Jamaica also has a high percentage of female-headed households, which amplifies the need for gender perspectives to be taken into account in strategies to deal with poverty. With higher levels of poverty, poor women are more vulnerable to the impact of natural hazards. They are also likely to bear the heaviest burdens when there are disasters.

The above information highlights the general fault-lines or vulnerabilities evident in the country's physical, socio-economic and cultural structure, which could present a challenge as it relates to disaster risk mortality.

Programmes/Policy

Against this background and consequent on the Hyogo and Sendai Framework for DRR, Jamaica has put into practice a comprehensive strategy, which is predicated on the following priority areas:

- 1. Enhanced community capacity to cope with the adverse effects of climate change and disasters;*
- 2. Disaster Risk Management mainstreamed at national and parish levels and incorporated into key sectors;*
- 3. Disaster Risk Management information utilised to build a culture of safety at all levels;*
- 4. Strengthening of Preparedness, Mitigation, Response and Recovery Systems;*

5. *Strengthening the National Risk Management Machinery, to include housing designs that reflect modern construction techniques;*
6. *Building the risk reduction capacity of vulnerable areas through community action;*
7. *Strengthening human and equipment resources nationally;*
8. *Strengthening risk management legislation and regulations;*
9. *Enhancing Vulnerability analysis and risk assessment for communities to include at risk coastal communities.*

These strategies help to ensure that disaster risk mortality is prevented or at best minimised in the event of a disaster event. These guiding principles also underpin our own national development plan, which also has a life span up to 2030.

Constraints

The absence of dedicated budget to reduce the vulnerability of populations most at risk remains a major challenge. We also need to intensify efforts aimed at adopting a socio-cultural approach to reducing risk as currently, budgetary allocations tend to favour addressing poverty alleviation strategies through the Government's Public assistance programme. This is an area that we hope we can continue to advance.

Conclusion/Way Forward

The Sendai Target on reducing mortality risk contributes to the goals and objectives of both the SAMOA Pathway and the Sustainable Development Goals. Both the SAMOA Pathway and the SDGs place people and planet at the centre of all sustainable development efforts. Reducing mortality risks in SIDS is effectively putting both people and the planet at the heart of the development process, by ensuring that the necessary mechanisms are in place for facilitating the realisation of human potential in a safe and secure environment.

A major thrust of our collective efforts will be the need for continued partnership and cooperation from the relevant stakeholders and international community. This will be critical in order to achieve a truly transformative, meaningful and sustainable disaster risk reduction platform and strategy. We have benefited from collaboration in the context of regional groupings like CARICOM, AOSIS, as well as with the UN System.

More dedicated action also needs to be focused on tackling underlying disaster risk drivers, such as the consequences of poverty and inequality, climate change and variability, unplanned and rapid urbanization, poor land management and compounding factors such as demographic change, weak institutional arrangements, non-risk-informed policies, lack of regulation and incentives for private disaster risk reduction investment, complex supply chains, limited availability of technology, unsustainable uses of natural resources, declining ecosystems, pandemics and epidemics.

Today's meeting is a continuation of the demonstrated commitment and political will to ensure that we steadily and speedily confront these related issues.

Thank you.