

PERMANENT MISSION OF JAMAICA

TO THE UNITED NATIONS

**STATEMENT BY**

**MRS. DIEDRE MILLS**

**DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE**

**JAMAICA**

**AT THE**

**EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

**OPEN-ENDED INFORMAL CONSULTATIVE PROCESS**

**ON OCEANS AND THE LAW OF THE SEA**

**15TH MAY 2017**

**UNITED NATION, NEWYORK**

Co-Chairs,

At the outset, my delegation congratulates you on your selection as Co-Chairs of the 18th meeting of the United Nations Open-ended informal consultative process on oceans and the law of sea. My delegation wishes to express its appreciation for the various reports and presentations to guide our deliberations. We believe that they provide invaluable insight and stimulating food-for-thought for the work that is before us. This year’s theme,’ “the effects of climate change on the oceans,” is both timely and relevant.

Let me also preface my comments by aligning my delegation’s intervention with that of Ecuador, on behalf of the G77 and China.

Co-Chairs,

The Secretary-General’s Report contained in A/72/70 correctly points to the dire and transcendent nature of the impacts that climate change has been having on oceans and seas. It is a sober and increasingly worrying conclusion that my delegation also shares. The situation is exacerbated by the economic and social implications that are inherent in the continued worsening of the situation.

Data collected by Jamaica’s National Environment Policy Agency (NEPA), for example, confirm a trend that for the last 5 years there has been an increase in sea surface temperatures around the island’s coast. We, therefore, have a real and intimate appreciation for the observations that have been advanced in respect of the direct correlation between ocean warming and extreme weather events. Over the past 25 to 30 years, Jamaica has experienced an increase in the frequency of natural events, mainly floods, as a result of tropical depression, tropical storms, hurricanes, droughts and landslides. Persons at risk, who are vulnerable to storm surges, hurricanes and flooding, among other hazards, make up an estimated 60 percent of Jamaica’s total population.

Co-Chairs,

Another effect sometimes linked to changes in sea temperature is the bleaching of corals. Since 2011, annual coral cover in Jamaica has averaged 19.7 per cent. It has ranged from a low of 11.8 per cent to a high of 23.3 per cent in 2016. Consequently and while average coral reef cover in Jamaica is slightly above the average coral cover for the wider Caribbean, it remains slightly lower than averages for reefs in the Southern Caribbean.

Recognizing the adverse impact that climate change has had on the island’s coral reefs and that coastal resources can no longer be effectively managed if biophysical monitoring is the only focus has been central to the Government’s approach to the issue. Additionally, the increased need for capacity building in monitoring social science indicators to address the impact led Jamaican authorities to host, in April 2016, the first integrated coral reef monitoring workshop in the region. The workshop saw the participation of trainers from the Dutch and French Caribbean, Cuba, Barbados and Jamaica.

Jamaica’s National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) 2016-2021, is also aimed at embracing Aichi targets related to minimizing anthropogenic pressures on coral reef systems and other vulnerable ecosystems being impacted by climate change or ocean acidification, so as to maintain their integrity and function. Activities to be undertaken until 2021 will include the monitoring of coral coverage and conditions on key coral reefs, and the linking of reef condition to specific management activities such as the number of marine protected areas or implemented nutrient abatement projects.

Co-Chairs,

The cumulative impacts of ocean warming and ocean acidification, as noted in paragraphs 32 and 33 of A/72/70, can be significant. One clear challenge will be the prospects for developing countries, including SIDS, to effectively realise their development objectives. This fact is forcefully advanced in paragraph 20 of A/72/70 with the very poignant reminder about the devastating impact that sea level rise could have for the low-lying islands in the Caribbean Sea as well as in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

The situation is aggravated by the breadth and depth of the impacts across livelihoods. The Technical Abstract of the First Global Integrated Marine Assessment on the Impacts of Climate Change and Related Changes in the Atmosphere on the Ocean highlights the fact that rising temperatures are likely to affect the distribution, reproduction and abundance of many marine species, as well as affect marine ecosystems. For communities dependent on the resources of the sea for their economic survival, this prognosis is both worrying and distressing. Jamaica’s National Development Plan - Vision2030- which is strongly aligned to the SDGs, promises an economy that is prosperous but Jamaica's vulnerability to natural and man-made hazards, such as those that we are discussing, stand as a sober reminder of some of the threats to achieving this prosperity.

Co-Chairs,

Capacity-building is a specific area of need for SIDS such as Jamaica. Paramount in this regard is the need to generate pertinent data and information. Equally important will be the technical skills, know-how and empowerment to design and implement sustainable policies at the national, regional and international levels.

The fact, as the aforementioned Technical Abstract highlights, that many parts of the ocean, including some areas beyond national jurisdiction, have been seriously degraded, reinforces the seriousness with which action has to be taken. If we are to fully understand the challenges and to effectively respond to them, marine scientific research as well as scientific data and knowledge on oceans and seas will be critical. We know, for example, that sargassum species have been impacting the beaches of Jamaica and is known to be generated by processes in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Like other Caribbean countries, this has significantly impacted our tourism industry as a result of the landing of large quantities of sargassum on our beaches. Research is required on the nature, extent and occurrence of these blooms. For SIDS like Jamaica, however, undertaking and implementing marine scientific research is not an easy task and so cooperation at all levels and involving all players will be essential. Funding and technology transfer will also be central.

Co-Chairs,

Against this background, my delegation concurs with the conclusions in the Secretary-General’s Report (A/72/70) that urgent action must be taken as a matter of priority. As the Report also notes, special attention must also be given “to enhance coordination in the implementation of relevant and mutually reinforcing legal and policy instruments, in particular to ensure the effective implementation of the UNCLOS and related instruments.” We believe, as the Report also posits, that this “will in turn support efforts to reach adaptation and mitigation targets under the Paris Agreement.”

Co-Chairs,

Inaction remains our greatest threat. We must ensure that we do not fall victim to the inertia that sometimes conflicts our willingness and desire to respond to the challenges that beset us. We simply don’t have the luxury of resting on our laurels in this regard.

I thank you.