

SENATE STATEMENT
by
Senator the Honourable Arnold J. Nicholson Q.C.
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade
on
The Twenty-first Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations
Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Eleventh
Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto
Protocol (CMP), Paris, France
29th November – 12th December 2015

Mr. President,

Global Significance of the Climate Change Conference

From 29th November to 12th December 2015, the eyes of the world were riveted on Paris where the Twenty-first Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was unfolding. The Conference was widely seen as the final opportunity for the international community to conclude a global agreement to effectively tackle climate change and its nefarious effects, after several previous attempts.

Against the backdrop of the fifth assessment report (AR5) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which set out incontrovertibly the negative impact of climate change on both planet and people, there were those who believed that the fate of the planet was hanging in the balance. The science was undeniable and there had been a sea-change in thinking which had marginalised those who sought to deny the voluminous evidence of climate change and its wide-ranging effects. Small island developing states, in particular,

viewed it as an existential threat and saw themselves as the principal hostages of a crisis that they had done very little to provoke and from which they could not extricate themselves without global action.

It was clear, then, that success at COP21 would represent a powerful symbol of the capacity of the international community to use the multilateral system to tackle the most pressing global challenges. That this Conference was coming at the end of a series of international engagements which began earlier in the year and which cumulatively set the stage for the sustainable development agenda for the coming decades, could not be ignored. Given the stakes, it was essential for Jamaica to be a present and active participant at the Summit.

In effect, the Paris Conference was as important for the scientific underpinning of the gigantic exercise which it presented, as for its impact on the global development agenda. Thus it was entirely appropriate that there was significant technical expertise within delegations and from inter- and non-governmental sources. Even more crucial, however, was the necessary presence of Heads of Government and Ministers to provide the political leadership and focus that ultimately secured the best possible outcome. I was therefore pleased to lead Jamaica's delegation to this most historic event.

Jamaica's Participation in COP21

Mr. President,

Addressing such a complex political and technical issue as climate change necessitated an inter-Ministerial approach between the Ministry of Water, Land,

Environment and Climate Change and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade. I am proud of the level of cooperation among the Government representatives who participated in the Conference. I also recognise the support from those who contributed to the delegation's preparations prior to departure and throughout. I have no doubt that our close collaboration will continue as we move forward in the implementation phase to ensure that our global undertakings have an impact at the local level. The Foreign Ministry stands ready to play its part in this regard.

I am convinced that we in Jamaica have been able to step up to meet the expectations of this important moment. I am in no doubt that this is due in no small part to the prescience of our Prime Minister in designating a Ministry specifically to address climate change. COP21 has certainly served to underscore the studied placing of a focus on Climate Change in the naming of a Ministry at the beginning of the term of the present administration.

Mr. President,

French Leadership of the Conference

It is recalled that the Climate Change Conference took place in Paris in the wake of a wave of horrific terrorist attacks on that city, merely days before the event. This irresistibly set the stage for a direct global focus on the primary duties of mankind: the preservation of human lives within the context of man's inhumanity to man; and the protection of the planet - the other side of the same coin, which relates to the preservation of mankind.

Given the extraordinary security and political challenges posed by those developments, the courage of the Government and people of France in forging ahead with the Conference is simply remarkable. In so doing, the Government and people of France, along with the international community, underscored that taking action to combat climate change and ensure the protection of the planet for future generations requires as much urgency as confronting terrorism. There is no doubt that we must work together to protect human lives and assure the sustainability of our planet. With the international community having taken this historic step in engaging on the issue of climate change under challenging circumstances and with credible outcome, there can be no turning back.

Let me place on record our recognition of the extraordinary leadership of French President Francois Hollande and Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius in deftly steering the Conference to a successful conclusion. Indeed, it was clear from the outset that the French Presidency of COP21 was committed to leaving no stone unturned in its efforts to secure a meaningful outcome in the form of a global agreement. In my estimation, the convening of the Heads in the Leaders Event at the beginning of the Conference, rather than at its end, was a political masterstroke. It signalled the highest level of political will. It was appropriately followed by the High-Level segment which accommodated interventions by Ministers which reinforced these commitments.

The meeting of Heads raised the stakes and underscored the perils of failure - both political and existential. In the end, the determination of the French Presidency, coupled with hard work undertaken in good faith and with flexibility,

at the level of negotiators and Ministers, led to the adoption of the Paris Agreement. This has changed the narrative on the actions to be taken to address the impacts of climate change.

CARICOM Participation and Impact

I must acknowledge the commendable work undertaken by CARICOM delegations, the CARICOM Secretariat, including the Secretary-General himself, and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) in ensuring coordination among the region's representatives. The effort to ensure that the region's interests would be addressed satisfactorily in the final outcome was given added impetus by the presence of two CARICOM Heads of Government during the first week of the Conference, and by the presence of nine (9) Ministers thereafter.

Prime Minister Freundel Stuart of Barbados, in his capacity as Chairman of CARICOM at the time of the Conference, and Prime Minister Kenny Anthony of St Lucia, the lead CARICOM Head of Government for Sustainable Development, addressed the Leaders' Event and met with H.E. Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary General and H.E. Barack Obama, President of the United States, among other High-Level representatives, to convey the region's priorities. Their guidance set the stage for the subsequent work by CARICOM Ministers and negotiators.

The Wider Caribbean Pavilion, which was a venue to showcase actions being taken in the region to tackle climate change, was also put to good use to support caucus meetings for CARICOM delegations. This helped to deepen contact and

camaraderie. I must mention the presence of a few of our artistes whose tunes had many at the Conference singing along to the refrain of “1.5 to stay alive”. This no doubt added to the momentum that led to the recognition of the global temperature goal long championed by island states, including Jamaica.

Mr. President,

This was cultural diplomacy at its finest, and a validation of the principle of regional integration that remains central to our foreign policy. The region’s cohesiveness and performance at COP21 provided further evidence that CARICOM remains invaluable as a medium for the amplification of our voices in the international community.

Highlights of the Paris Agreement

Mr. President,

Turning to the Paris Agreement, we regard the outcome of the Conference as a positive one for Jamaica, for CARICOM and for Small Island Developing States more generally. We were pleased, in particular, to see recognition of the need to endeavour to keep global average temperature below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. This was essential, given that for many island states climate change is a matter of survival. In addition, we regard the continued recognition of the special circumstances and vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as a victory, given that such recognition has come under attack with increased frequency in a range of multilateral fora.

Mindful of the fact that the implementation of the Agreement will require the mobilisation of significant resources, the commitment to provide climate financing of at least US\$100 billion each year up to 2020 is a potential game-changer for countries such as ours that will require support for our continued efforts to combat the phenomenon of climate change.

The Paris Agreement recognises the need to address loss and damage resulting from the adverse effects of climate change. This is particularly significant given the key role played by CARICOM delegations in the arduous negotiations that resulted in the inclusion of loss and damage in the text. The very concept of loss and damage met with strong resistance from other countries. Its recognition in the Paris Agreement will enable countries that are most vulnerable to climate change to secure enhanced support to deal with the impact of slow onset climate events, irreversible and permanent damage resulting from climate change, as well as non-economic losses.

Climate change is multi-faceted and a range of actions will have to be undertaken at the national and local levels if it is to be combated effectively. The Paris Agreement constitutes a clear statement by the international community that such actions will indeed be taken. Furthermore, it entails commitments that resources will be provided to support countries that are particularly vulnerable and those with limited means to combat the phenomenon. It can therefore be rightly considered a milestone agreement in the pantheon of multilateral agreements. Of course, the true test of its value will be in the extent to which it

results in action that leads to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and support for adaptation.

Concluding Remarks

Mr. President,

While the success of COP21 is significant, we must acknowledge the many years of multilateral engagement that led up to the Paris Conference, including the incremental advances embodied in the outcomes of the preceding COPs in Cancun, Durban, Warsaw, Doha, Copenhagen and Lima. The work of the UN Secretary-General, and his climate change team, also contributed to building political momentum for a global agreement, particularly through the convening of the Climate Summit in September 2014, and related events in the preceding two years.

In addition, the period since September 2014 saw the international community engaged in a series of multilateral conferences on sustainable development, which resulted in the successful adoption of the SAMOA Pathway for SIDS, agreements on disaster risk reduction in Sendai, Japan, and financing for development in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, as well as the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by Heads in New York in September 2015.

It is clear, therefore, that the momentum was in favour of success at the Paris Summit, the last in a series of High-Level multilateral meetings whose successful conclusion would affirm that rumours of the demise of multilateralism had been greatly exaggerated.

Mr. President,

It is entirely arguable that this has been the most impactful meeting on European soil since Churchill, Stalin, Roosevelt and DeGaulle gathered at Yalta, in The Crimea, at the end of the Second World War. The world was equally riveted on the staging of the game-changing moment in time.

There is no denying, therefore, that COP21 was monumental. It is as important for what it has come to represent as for what it is hoped to eventually achieve. For one thing, despite the apparent differences in views, the world was engaged, focused, driven to succeed. Climate Change has now assumed a priority space on the global agenda, alongside other demanding issues such as terrorism and poverty reduction. Global thinking will not be the same after the Paris Conference. There cannot be any turning back.

The wide representation of governments at the highest levels and the breadth of non-governmental and local involvement speak volumes of the commonality of interests and bear highlighting.

The validation of the success of the Agreement will be in the fulfilment of its commitments by the Member States which have entered into this agreement.

The Agreement provides a sound basis for tackling one of the greatest challenges of our times.

However, its implementation requires the effective collaboration and inputs of all of Government, the private sector, academia, and civil society.

Why? As we have said what is at stake is the very preservation of mankind.

Failure is not an option. We must seize this opportunity.

I thank you.