Hon. Alwin Hales (Jamaica) – Speech delivered at International Conference on Climate Change Adaptation, Beijing 3 July 2013

I am honoured to be at this Conference devoted to climate change adaptation, a matter that is critical to the world, particularly to those countries which are not only very vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, but which are also striving for sustainable development, that is, economic prosperity, social wellbeing and preservation of our heritage and cultural identity and our natural environment.

My Minister, the Hon. Robert Pickersgill is passionate about the urgency of addressing climate change. Indeed, our Prime Minister has prioritized climate change matters by providing cogent political support for the development of policy and institutional framework to enhance Jamaica’s resilience to climate change.

[Mr. Chairman], I thank you for the invitation to this Conference on my Minister’s behalf and on my own.

I am heartened to see Adaptation gain prominence and traction in recent times which has brought to the forefront the urgency of taking measures to address climate change impacts that include, among other things, residual damages and/or slow onset impacts.

My Minister is grateful for the extensive work undertaken by GLOBE to increase legislative capacity through its studies and facilitating opportunities for discussion and knowledge exchange such as this conference.

Additionally, he has high expectations that this Conference will serve as a constructive medium for the exchange of knowledge relevant to increase our capacity in the crafting of effective adaptation practices, policy and/or legislative developments to further promulgate sustainable development.

Commendations are extended to ACCC and INTASAVE for their efforts to do detailed assessment of climate change impacts to assist in increasing certainty to facilitate improved decision making.

The presentations of the steps taken by China over the last four (4) years of the ACCC study have demonstrated significant and exemplary adaptation measures.

However, recognizing that action must be taken even in the absence of detailed scientific certainty as to the full nature and risk of an impact, my country is presently finalizing a Climate Change Policy that has the Precautionary Principle as one of the guiding precepts in addressing Climate Change.

While recognizing the importance of institutions and legislation, my Minister is acutely aware of the importance of “people power”, that is, the support of stakeholders will be one of the major drivers...
of consistent and successful adaptation regardless of whether they belong to public sector, private sector or civil society.

Since the formation of the Ministry of Water, Land, Environment and Climate Change in January of 2012, we have embarked on a multi-prong approach to addressing climate change holistically through, among other measures, multi-sectoral coordination of climate change activities while seeking to customize the most suitable adaptation measures within the context of the respective sectors through the development of sector plans.

As previously noted in this forum, one generic approach is inadequate to address the complexity of climate change and adaptation in a locale as each must be viewed in their context. Detailed assessments and Policy development must be undertaken to produce effective adaptation legislation as the legislative response to climate change must be based off an assessment of the jurisdiction’s experience and projections.

Presently, there is significant policy development taking place in Jamaica with respect to addressing climate change impacts including the preparation of a draft National Climate Change Policy Framework and Action Plan, the National Coastal Resources Policy, and the National Cays Policy.

The National Energy Policy, supports adaptation through its sub – policies in the areas of Energy Conservation and Efficiency, Waste-to-Energy, and Renewable Energy. Recent national plans such as the Protected Areas System Master Plan (PASMP) and the Forest Management Plan have also incorporated climate change considerations. Further, in revising our National Land Policy, climate change considerations will be prominent.

The draft Climate Change Policy Framework and Action Plan envisages the development of sector plans for key economic sectors which are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

My ministry will be assessing the policy, legislation and initiatives in critical sectors such as health, agriculture, water with a view to ensuring that climate change synergies can be identified, harnessed and/or developed.

Comparative studies and assessments will be done of existing climate change legislation of other countries, such as the Climate Act of the UK and the General Climate Change law of Mexico, in order to prepare appropriate drafting instructions for our own climate change legislation which we are committed to promulgating in the near future.

The GLOBE Climate Legislation Study is highly useful and further underscores the need for comprehensive detailed multi-sectoral analyses of the various policy and flagship legislation to fully appreciate the diversity of and scope of global legislative adaptation efforts.

In the interim, pending the enactment of codified climate change legislation, the principles of the UNFCCC, and Cancun Adaptation Framework have been critical guides to the substantive approaches taken by Jamaica, in addition to its applicable existing legislation, to further develop climate change adaptation policy and strategies.

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Government’s role is seen as being one of facilitation and coordination. Actions are being undertaken by the policy makers and/or legislators to build capacity, prioritize and mainstream climate change considerations into decision making processes as well as institute mechanisms to facilitate the sharing of the experiences and best practices, examples of ingenuity and creativity and innovation nationally, regionally and internationally. In this regard, South-South Collaboration represents an excellent opportunity to increase Jamaica’s capacity through information sharing, knowledge and technological transfer.

The participatory approach is being pursued for consensus and capacity building including the establishment of the Climate Change Advisory Committee, launched in April of 2012, and the soon to be launched Climate Change Division within my Ministry.

The National Climate Change Advisory Committee is comprised of members from academia, environmental groups and NGOs among other stakeholders as a manifestation of the institutionalization of the participatory approach, knowledge development and information sharing guided by sound science.

Through the work of this Committee, among other initiatives, Jamaica intends to further develop the body of climate change data required to inform good adaptation including the formulation of effective policies, legislation and strategies for adaptation and disaster risk reduction related to climate change.

To build capacity in civil society, community-based adaptation projects have been done through the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme and under the Government of Jamaica-European Union Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction Project. Last week, Minister Pickersgill tabled in the House of Parliament, the “2012 State of the Jamaican Climate – Information for Resilience Building Summary for Policymakers”.

One aspect of Adaptation that Jamaica is prioritizing is Loss and Damage. In order to quantify loss and damage, and provide a reliable basis for planning, as well as enhance applications for international financial support, it is essential that Jamaica conducts exercises to develop comprehensive codified country-specific needs assessments, similar to that undertaken by the UNFCCC Secretariat. This assessment is critical to determining Jamaica’s National Economic, Environment and Development requirements. However, such assessments are produced at significant costs especially when climate change is seen as taking place on a continuum comprised of events and slow onset processes.

Accessing Climate funding support will be critical to financing the level of assessments that Jamaica needs to undertake which are vital to inform adaptation. The information gleaned from these assessments will contribute to identifying the legislation that is required to promote the realization of sustainable adaptation.

Ladies and gentlemen, in closing, Jamaica will always welcome any activity that will advance the cause of adaptation to climate change.