



**Statement by:
Hon. John Briceño
Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Natural Resources and the
Environment
To the
Many Strong Voices: Stakeholders Workshop on Climate Change
Impacts and Adaptation in the Arctic and Small Island Developing
States.**

**Belize Biltmore Plaza Hotel
Belize City, Monday, May 28, 2007**

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You have come to Belize to continue the discussions and deliberations on what I think everyone agrees is now one of the greatest challenges to our civilization.

You have come in a time when as the experts put it “we are in an unusually active period of hurricane activity, as a result of a combination of natural variability and global warming.”

You have come in a time when we in government have been accused of having the necessary analyses with the plans already put on the table, but nothing seems to be happening.”

You have come to Belize only two weeks after the Presidents and Heads of State of Central America and CARICOM, mindful of the increasing threat that climate change and sea level rise pose to our sustainable development, called for a High Level Event on Climate Change.

So I hope you have come to Belize to help us understand what we must do to face this greatest challenge to our civilization.

Today you meet as Many Strong Voices to design a five year plan for the small states of SIDS and for the states of the Arctic Region. It is important work you set upon for the next three days, and I welcome you here to Belize and lend my support for this important undertaking.

Over the next three days you will vigorously pursue discussion on how together we can build our capacity to mitigate against the effects of climate change and sea level rise; how we can adapt to the changes ahead and share our experiences with one another. We know the stakes are high. We know that despite what is staring us in the face, there are still many in the corporate world as well as some policy makers in the United States Federal Government who remain unconvinced.

I say this particularly in the context of the current disagreements over the communiqué to be issued by the G-8 countries at their upcoming summit in Germany. Why is it that in spite of the overwhelming evidence and what is at stake for our planet, that countries like the US remain unconvinced that we must change, so much so that they have rejected Germany's proposal for deep long-term cuts in greenhouse gas emissions? Even with the backing of Britain and now Japan, the United State Government refuses to support the proposal for cutting global greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2050.

We must also continue to bring international pressure on countries like China and India to utilize the advances they have made technologically and economically, to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and to use our influence in international organizations, especially as it relates to voting patterns, to insist that countries who behave in a manner that is harmful to our very survival change their behavior.

We the small states must take the lead in pressing the international community and in making the case, after all we are the ones most at risk in spite of the fact that we are the least polluters.

Many Strong Voices must use the available research to highlight the risks of inaction. This is why today I must congratulate you on the objectives of this workshop, which among many things; include outreach activities aimed at educating and informing others of the issues facing developed and developing states as it relates to this phenomenon.

I am also pleased to see that you plan to discuss the latest scientific results and the implications they may have on our adaptation plans. I say this because we have more conclusive evidence that rising sea levels will be one of the greater climate change challenge for those of us with low lying coasts. The recent I.P.C.C. study shows that the last time the Arctic and the Antarctic were warmer than they are today, for an extended period, global sea levels were at least thirteen feet higher. The study also indicated that temperatures will continue to climb for decades that heat waves and floods will become more frequent, and that from this will come even greater challenges to our sustainable development.

Here in the Caribbean most of our larger Cities are on the coast and many of these cities are either at sea level or below. In fact this very City where you are meeting, Belize City, is below or just at sea level and it is home to 33 percent of our population.

It will take only one incident to cause a city like Belize City and many others in this region to have to deal with one of the greatest natural catastrophes in our history.

In 1998, when predictions indicated that Hurricane Mitch could strike this Belize, we had to make the decision to evacuate the entire city, a logistical nightmare for our security forces. Never before had we been faced with such a situation and what we learnt from that exercise was how much unprepared we were for this kind of mobilization effort. I am sure that in other countries in our regions the idea of having to evacuate entire cities and worse, the possibility that these people may never return to what were their homes, is an overwhelming thought for governments. So I welcome a workshop that is action oriented, that has as an objective the desire to engage in discussion on the way to recognize our vulnerabilities and how to adapt to the changing situations.

Recently I have read and heard a lot on the issue of Climate Change and Sea level rise, and I am happy to hear of the efforts of so many, from former Vice President Gore, who has been a true champion of this cause for decades now, to the initiatives by the Clinton Foundation. I am also pleased that notable celebrities like Leonardo DiCaprio, Sheryll Crow, and even Peter Mondavi from the Robert Mondavi vineyards in California are getting involved in the Green Revolution. We welcome all who see the importance in the sustainable management of our planet. Of course for us in this room, from the policy makers to the partners in environmental sustainability of small states, our task is to ensure that this ever increasing debate keep **our** issues at the forefront. We must continue to remind the global community that what for most may be an imminent danger, is for us a reality. Let us resolve therefore to ensure that our many voices be heard loudly in every forum, insisting that we are the most vulnerable and that we need action now not tomorrow. Let us remain vigilant to ensure that immediacy of the impacts of climate change on our small vulnerable states not be diluted by the new celebrity attention to climate change. Let us hope that as you produce a "State of Negotiations" report, that we reflect the need for our voices to be heard above the ever increasing noise.

Among you today are some notable personalities on the issue of Climate Change and Sea level rise, I am sure our own Dr. Kenrick Leslie will set the tone for this workshop in a few minutes and I can assure you that other eminent scholars here at this workshop will take this opportunity to put together the framework for an action plan that will not only be dynamic, but will set the pace for

regional and extra regional cooperation in this most important work of protecting our planet.

We are happy to have you here in Belize and I wish you every success in your deliberations and conclusions.

Thank you.