

OPENING STATEMENT

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at the

Caribbean Symposium on Mainstreaming the Sustainable

Development Goals in National Development Planning

14-16 February 2017

Kingston, Jamaica

Ambassador Sheila Sealy Monteith, Under-Secretary for Multilateral Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Jamaica;
H.E. Joachim Schmillen, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Jamaica and the Bahamas;
H.E. Penelope Beckles, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations;
Ambassador Dessima Williams, Senior Advisor on Sustainable Developing Goals, Office of the President of UN General Assembly;
Distinguished Delegates;
Colleagues from the United Nations System;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is indeed my pleasure to welcome you to the Caribbean symposium on mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in national development planning. Ambassador Monteith, it is always

good to be home, and for me a special pleasure to collaborate with the Foreign Ministry; I still count myself a member of the extended family. You have the appreciation of my entire team for the kind assistance that we have received under Mrs Miller's watchful care in planning this event. ECLAC is especially grateful to the government of the Federal Republic of Germany, through the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), for their support of this initiative. I am very pleased that Ambassador Schmillen could join us this morning.

I convey to you all the best wishes of my Executive Secretary Alicia Barcena, who has sent the Deputy Chief of her Executive Office, Mr Romain Zivy, to demonstrate the wider ECLAC's support for the important work we will do here this week.

Distinguished delegates,

One year has already passed since the SDGs were adopted by the international community; one year since we embarked on the ambitious 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, pledging to ensure that no-one is left behind. The first High level political forum held last summer marked the anniversary by reaffirming it a "people-centred,

universal and transformative agenda, with goals and targets that are integrated and indivisible, balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development”. They described it “a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity, while strengthening universal peace in larger freedom, to be implemented by all countries and stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership”. Awesome. They were in fact reflecting on the profound commitment and the formidable task that the global community has undertaken to pursue within a fifteen year timeframe. And we are now fourteen and counting.

Countries everywhere are now giving their attention to the structures and strategies that must be put in place to give life and direction to this plan of action. This symposium is therefore most timely; even urgent, as we in Latin America and the Caribbean prepare to join other regions in mapping the planning and implementation phase of Agenda 2030. Implementation of the SDGs will be pursued, monitored and measured by a mechanism that has been established with global, regional and national dimension. This is to ensure that while we advance the implementation of a set of global goals and targets, we make sure to accommodate and respect the unique challenges and needs of individual countries or groups of states. For SDG implementation is a country-led process. Governments therefore have the latitude to set

their national targets, guided by the global ambition, but with due consideration to national circumstance.

This is why we are meeting this week; to reaffirm the lead role that you, the countries of the Caribbean, must play in advancing this process, while seeking to position your endeavours within a wider regional framework. We are also here to offer our support to your renewed efforts to pursue meaningful implementation of the SDGs in the Caribbean. And I am confident that I speak for all the representatives of the UN system and of other regional and international organizations in this room, who are here in their number in a tremendous show of solidarity and support.

This meeting offers you an opportunity to gain greater clarity on the broader global and regional review process of which you are a part, and a better understanding of the role you can play within it. In this regard, our meeting serves also as a timely opportunity for Caribbean consultation in preparation for the first meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, which will be held during April 26-28 in Mexico City.

This Forum represents the regional mechanism of LAC for reporting on implementation of the SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean. The reports by member states of their stewardship will reach the High Level Political Forum at the General Assembly through this body. This forum, which will convene annually, will also offer opportunity for peer learning on the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) which will be submitted to the HLPF annually. We will hear much more about the Forum and the global and regional reporting frameworks in the presentations to be made this morning.

Distinguished representatives,

The SDGs, comprising 17 goals and 169 targets represent a fundamental shift in thinking on development policy and progress as they balance the three critical elements; the economic, social and environmental, in an organic fashion. Growth with equity and environmental sustainability is our new vision. As Small Island Developing States, the challenges to implementation are even more complex if we endeavour integrate the SIDS sustainable development agenda, along with the SDGs into our national development plans. However, I am confident that this process will reenergise our subregion, now challenged by a high debt burden, limited fiscal space,

and pervasive social and environmental vulnerability. The SDGs, when implemented as a composite whole, offer us a blueprint for development that is truly integrative, comprehensive and dynamic. However if you are to harness the full potential of this transformative agenda, you will need the tools to do it justice. I speak of the need for a resilient, coherent institutional infrastructure, guided by national vision and leadership; of the need for a strategy that builds indigenous human capacity, particularly in highly skilled fields; of the need for increased resources both domestic and international, which, through investment or partnership, can assist in energizing the creativity and innovativeness of our people. Success in SDG implementation will not be achieved without dedicated leadership invested in a defined institutional framework at the national level.

Careful planning is also an important first step as member states align the SDGs and the Samoa Pathway with national development priorities. The reality is that development planning in the Caribbean in recent years has not been uniformly established. More frequently, member states have pursued medium term macroeconomic or sector-specific strategies. For the countries that are currently implementing a national development plan, such plans generally pre-date adoption of the SDG and the Samoa Pathway. They would therefore not fully reflect the

commitment to these global goals at the time of adoption. Mainstreaming the SDGs will therefore require a commitment to long term planning which must be comprehensive, engaging and designed to go beyond the finite cycle of political regimes.

This symposium provides a peer-learning platform for member States and is aimed at providing guidance and exposing policy makers to the range of tools, technical and other support and obligations that are required to adequately mainstream the SDG goals and targets in national development planning. I look forward to hearing from many of you today.

This event is the first in a series of activities being implemented by ECLAC to provide support to member States in the SDG implementation process. This support is of course complementary to that being provided by the UN system active in the region, as well as by other key subregional organizations. Indeed we held inter-agency consultation yesterday to exchange notes and to consider how best we align our respective efforts to optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of our collective efforts.

Our meeting this week serves effectively as the launch of a project financed by BMZ-GIZ in support of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Through this project, the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, in collaboration with the Planning of Public Administration Division of ECLAC (ILPES), will promote evidence-based policy planning for sustainable development in the subregion.

The follow-up and review process for the 2030 Agenda integrally includes national, regional and global reporting mechanisms that are data-intensive and which are poised to challenge the National Statistical Systems (NSS) of the Caribbean even further. Yes, this is a challenge; but it also presents an opportunity for us to address data inadequacy in the countries of our subregion once and for all.

We are aware that advancing evidence-based policy planning requires data—data that are of high quality, accessible, timely and disaggregated. Data should inform the selection of targets and indicators for gauging national development priorities. The framework of SDG indicators is no less demanding in terms of data. This is why ECLAC has placed great importance on ensuring that the Caribbean

produces globally comparable and standardized statistics for the SDG indicators. Achieving this, however, entails a process that begins with proper planning, including the identification and production of baseline data for indicators. Given the state of the National Statistical Systems of the Caribbean, significant investment to transform their operations and enhance their capacity to respond adequately to the task ahead will be required.

Through this symposium and during subsequent workshops that ECLAC will organize as a part of this project, we hope to identify areas of need for technical assistance by member States to support SDG planning, implementation and reporting.

Ladies and gentlemen, the next two and a half days promise to be informative and engaging. I encourage you to share your experiences and to take advantage of the peer learning and collaborative environment that a meeting such as this allows. I offer you the full support of my team. We look forward to hearing from you how we can be of assistance as you embark on this dynamic journey.

Thank you.