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**SMALL STATES
CONFERENCE ON
SEA LEVEL RISE
MALE, 14 - 18 NOVEMBER 1989**

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

COUNTRY STATEMENT

Delivered by

**Hon. Lincoln Myers
Minister of Environment & National Service
of the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago**

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

CENTRE FOR TROPICAL COASTAL
MANAGEMENT STUDIES

18 November 1989

Mr. Chairman, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government and People of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I would like to congratulate the Government of the Republic of Maldives for having the foresight and taking the initiative in hosting this Small States Conference on Sea Level Rise. May I also express our appreciation of the tremendous effort and excellent organisation and hospitality of the Maldivian Government and people in ensuring the success of this conference and making our sojourn in your beautiful country, a memorable experience.

Mr. Chairman, there is growing evidence that the rising sea level is inextricably linked to global warming and climatic change and, there is broad consensus that there probably is a relationship between these effects and atmospheric pollution resulting from the activities of man. The increase in the introduction of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere are implicated as contributory to global warming, with present best estimates pointing to an increase in average global temperature of 1⁰ C to 2⁰ C by the year 2030. The rate of sea level rise over the last 100 years was estimated at about 1.2 millimetres per year while the predicted rate for the next few years ranges from 1 to 11 millimetres per year. As the sea level rises, there will be erosion of land area, but the extent of erosion at different locations is uncertain.

The picture that comes across from the scientific community is one of uncertainty with respect to inter-relationships of atmospheric pollution, climatic change, global warming and sea level rise and, to some extent the response to changes in these parameters. In spite of these uncertainties, the recent Noordwijk Declaration on Atmospheric Pollution and Climatic Change however indicates the concern of the global community, of the contribution of greenhouse gases to climate change, and it calls for compiling the necessary elements for a future framework conventions on climate change.

Irrespective of the uncertainties mentioned and the calls for efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emission and to develop conventions and protocols, the continuing rise in sea level poses a threat to coastal areas and, in particular small coastal and island states, with significant portion of low lying areas, such as those states present here today. We cannot afford to wait indefinitely for precise estimations of future changes on account of our vulnerability. We must therefore act now and let our voices be heard so that our circumstances are taken into consideration and incorporated into any response strategy developed to combat global environmental problems. Failing this, we will suffer the consequences of complacency which could include memories of lands that once were.

Mr. Chairman we cannot put the blame for continuous sea level rise, disastrous tidal surges and atypically strong hurricanes and typhoons on nature, nor can we put the blame at the Alter of God. Man has modified environmental conditions to a significant

degree and, he must therefore accept the responsibility of correcting his past and present errors to ensure a hospitable environment for future generations.

What are our options? Small developing states such as ours are constrained by lack of financial resources and pertinent technical capabilities, severe debt burdens and the demands of survival and national development on our limited resources. The fact that the cost of land protection of small island is very expensive per hectare of protected land when compared to larger land areas indicates that the cost of protection against sea level rise will consume a large proportion of the resources of these small states for many years in the future.

It is clear that we cannot go it alone. It is necessary to seek the assistance of industrialised countries and multilateral organisations in many areas including finance, technology transfer, training and establishing guidelines with respect to addressing many of the problems associated with sea level rise. In this regard, my delegation supports the call by developing countries of the world, for the setting in place of an appropriate International Financial Mechanism to ensure that the burden of protecting our low-lying coastal areas from rising sea levels is achieved within the context of a worldwide programme for sustainable development and the protection of the environment. The multiplicity of the problems and economic implications are enormous. Sea level rise will increase beach and land erosion, loss of farmlands, wet lands, production areas, industries, salt ponds, roads, sewers and other infrastructure

and necessitate relocation of infrastructure and communities. There may be loss of nature areas and disruption of ecological systems including swamps, mangroves and coral reefs. An increase in salt water intrusion will affect farmlands and require changes in crops and farming methodologies where agriculture remains a possibility. Salt water intrusion will also reduce the reservoir of fresh groundwater which is vital in some areas. There are a number of other implications but I used these to illustrate the significant effect that a sea level rise will have for our states.

Therefore, what must we do individually and collectively? It is necessary to:

1. Sensitize our populations to the issue of sea level rise and related phenomena as well as their probable impacts and possible remedial alternatives available. This must include a public education programme which will serve to stimulate public debate on the issue, and generate support and acceptability for remedial measures and their concurrent financial implications;
2. Sensitise the global community and in particular the industrialized countries to our vulnerability to, and constraints, in addressing the problem of sea level rise. Our resources are inadequate to allow sufficient protection against the encroaching waters of the oceans and seas. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kuala Lumpur in October of this year these constraints were recognised and the resulting Langkawai Declaration on Environment

indicated their support of low-lying and island countries, in their efforts to protect themselves and their vulnerable natural marine ecosystems from the effects of sea level rise;

3. Actively participate in international fora and work groups when these and other environmental issues are debated and global response strategies initiated eg. Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Control and The Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and its Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone layer. The financial burdens associated with attendance at some of these meetings can be reduced by rotating regional representation and seeking funding from appropriate sources. In addition to acting as a group, we should encourage regional initiatives to address environmental problems of common concern, one example of which is the First Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Ministerial Conference on the Environment held in Trinidad and Tobago in May of this year. The consequent Port of Spain Accord on the Management and Conservation of the Caribbean Environment serves as a policy framework for regional action;
4. Seek the advice of organisations with expertise in this area eg. UNEP, WMO and other international and national non-profit organisations:

5. Cooperate and exchange ideas, information and response technologies which may be pertinent to countries with similar conditions;
6. Initiate pilot activities in the areas of:
 - (a) Replanting of coral reefs particularly in areas that have been damaged by storms or as a result of stress. This is necessary for rapid recolonisation of these areas by corals thus facilitating the buildup of natural coastal protection barriers. This technique may also be employed to protect exposed coastlines where there were no corals in recent past.
 - (b) Management and conservation of mangrove areas including replanting of denuded and foreshore areas to accelerate land buildup. This will also increase natural habitats for juvenile marine organisms thus enhancing local fisheries. The introduction of mangrove species to vulnerable areas where they were not previously found should be investigated in order to test the viability of this option. We can all learn from these pilot activities and possibly apply them in our own countries.
7. Prioritise the areas in our countries which are most susceptible to changes in sea level and determine the responses necessary for these areas based on national priorities.

Trinidad and Tobago is in support of intensifying research in understanding climate change, greenhouse effect, sea level rise, and their implications for the environment, as well as methodologies for reducing their impacts, but we believe small states need to concentrate their efforts at land and ecosystems protection and buildup (for example, coral reefs, mangrove swamps, land reclamation, defense mechanisms possibly including the building of dykes and groynes and the development of water management systems). It is necessary to concentrate our activities in these areas because of our vulnerability and constraints.

Mr. Chairman, in supporting the establishment of a climate and sea level centre and monitoring network, I would like to suggest Trinidad and Tobago as a focal point for the monitoring network in the Caribbean Region. This is based on the fact that we possess the necessary capabilities through our Institute of Marine Affairs, National Hydrographic Surveying Unit and other National Agencies to carry out basic work in this area.

We further support the establishment of an action group of small states as a mean of collaborating on issues related to sea level rise. At the same time however we urge all low-lying small coastal and island states to utilize every available opportunity either individually or collectively to increase international awareness of our unique circumstances.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, our response must first be inwardly generated before we can expect any external assistance. Our destiny is in our hands, the future of our children depends on how we respond to these warnings today. If this generation of

leaders fail to solve the problem of environmental degradation in its many forms history will not absolve us.

I thank you for your kind attention.