

Presentation by
Rt. Hon. Hubert A. Ingraham
Prime Minister
Commonwealth of The Bahamas
UN High Level Event

I commend the Secretary General for convening this High Level Event to place increased focus on the serious challenges facing the world as a result of climate change.

These challenges are particularly acute for Small Island Developing States like The Bahamas which are extremely vulnerable to rising sea levels, coral bleaching and increasingly powerful tropical hurricanes.

Climate change is a serious threat to our economic viability, our social development and our territorial integrity.

During the last two decades our region has witnessed an alarming increase in the number and ferocity of hurricanes and The Bahamas has felt the full brunt of some of them.

This has placed a heavy burden on our limited resources as repeated restoration and recovery efforts have demanded the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars over the last decade alone.

These resources had to be diverted from critically important national development priorities, hence compromising our efforts towards sustainable development.

If not enough is done now to arrest this trend, the situation will only worsen. Indeed, on present trend, it is said that some particularly low-lying island states are very likely to become entirely uninhabitable.

In the face of such a challenge, The Bahamas, a founding member of Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), joins its voice with other like-minded states, in our region and around the globe, in calling for a global agreement in Copenhagen with ambitious, legally-binding targets, in order to achieve the ultimate objectives of the Convention.

The industrialised countries have a responsibility to accept the leading role they must play in this enterprise, especially by committing to the reduction of their greenhouse gas emissions.

The Bahamas accepts that this is a problem not only for the developed countries but for all of us. We take great pride in our beautiful and rich environment and we accept responsibility for the preservation of our natural patrimony.

We have, within our limited capabilities, undertaken a variety of initiatives including the dramatic expansion of our national park system.

Some 50 years ago we established the first NGO-managed national marine and land park, and in recent years we have expanded that system to become one of the largest in the western hemisphere.

We will continue to fulfil our commitments. We call on the international community to support the efforts of small states such as ours by increasing and simplifying access to financing and making environmental technology more readily available globally.

We also call on developed states to re-examine certain initiatives undertaken in the name of environmental protection – such as the air passenger levy and the proposed marine bunkering levies -- to ensure that they do not represent a further burden to small states.

The Bahamas, recognising that climate change is a threat we all face, is committed to collaborating with the family of nations to ensure our own survival and the survival of humankind in a sustainable development model for planet Earth.
