

**Hon. Minister Robert Pickersgill
Ministry of Water, Land, Environment and Climate Change**

**Remarks on the Occasion of NEPA's 11th Anniversary Church
Service held at St Luke's Church, Cross Roads**

Sunday May 6, 2012

Let me warmly greet Archdeacon Patrick Cunningham, Rev. Elizabeth Riley and other members of the leadership of the St. Luke's Church.

I greet also, all the members of the NEPA family headed by Peter Knight our Donor Partners, and representatives from the private sector, academia, partners for the environment and all other worshippers present.

I am happy to have this opportunity to be worshipping here today at this famous sanctuary and on the occasion of the celebration of the 11th anniversary of the National Environment and Planning Agency.

On behalf of the NEPA team, I would like to thank the Church for being so gracious in accommodating us.

As Minister with the portfolio responsibility for the Environment, and under whose purview NEPA falls, I take this opportunity to thank all present here and indeed the wider public and various '*communities of interest*' who have helped in one way or another, to foster the achievement of environmental requirements for our country. I wish to single out the Non-Governmental Organizations, Community-Based Organizations and civil society groups who work tirelessly, often on a purely voluntary basis, to help in the maintenance of environmental integrity. Although NEPA bears principal responsibility for the environment, environmental stewardship is the corporate and individual responsibility of all Jamaicans.

Indeed it is recorded in Psalms 104 at verse 12, and I quote “ He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and the herb for the service of man that he may bring forth food out of earth” End of quote.

We are therefore all of us, trustees of the Environment.

If we compare NEPA’s age with that of independent Jamaica, now 50, you will agree that the agency is relatively young but in that short time in our nation’s history, it has made a sterling contribution towards sustainable **development through the protection and conservation of Jamaica’s natural resources.**

It should however be recognized that the need for protecting the environment was realized long before the formation of NEPA, as Jamaica was abreast of global responses and trends in the environmental arena. In 1958, the Town and Country Planning Authority was formed by virtue of the TCPA Act of that year.

By the early 1970s, development plans included segments on sustainable land use and many of our educators were writing international environmental education material. The legislature had also formulated laws for the wise use and protection of some sectors of the environment.

By 1975 the Natural Resources Conservation Department (NRCD) was formed as a response to the outcomes of the UN conference on Development; and in 1991, the Natural Resources Conservation Authority Act was passed and the Natural Resources Conservation Authority (NRCA) was instituted under that Act in 1992, the year of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil.

In 2001, NEPA was formed by an amalgamation of three entities; the NRCA, the then Town Planning Department and the Land Development and Utilization Commission (LDUC).

The thinking behind the merger was to have all environment and land use or planning issues managed by a single agency to ensure that all critical issues relating to the environment were simultaneously taken into consideration in a holistic way when decisions on development options are taken. This merger provides an opportunity to apply planning policies and appropriate environmental management systems to meet our environmental and developmental needs in a manner that is efficient and cost-effective.

Indeed it is as if NEPA is aware of Psalm 96 vs. 11

“Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad: let the sea roar and the fullness thereof”.

The Agency has made strides in discharging its responsibilities under the various statutes that guide its work.

Some of these include the Town and Country Planning Act, the Wildlife Protection Act - for the protection of our birds, endemic and endangered Species, among others and, the Beach Control Act.

Natural resources have long been recognized as critical to social well-being, spiritual health and economic prosperity and in recognition of this, the NRCA Act mandates the Agency to educate the public on these issues. This has been an area of much success through great support from international donor partners and local partnerships for action through educational institutions and many NGOs. Over the years, education and awareness activities by NEPA have engaged the judiciary, environmental groups, the police (both the JCF and ISCF), school principals, colleges, teachers and students at various levels and the wider citizenry.

Development control through development orders and plans and the Permit and Licence System, including the use of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as a tool for environmental management, have worked to maintain **a balance between the need for development and the imperative for environmental protection.** The need for this balance is part of the reason why there is currently a pilot project underway in the Agency to include the valuation of natural resources into the EIA Process and so through cost/benefit analyses we will be able to make more informed decisions about development options. The Agency has taken an adaptive management approach as it seeks to ensure that new developments are as climate-proof as is feasible while also striving to remain efficient, cutting-edge and relevant in the face of shrinking financial resources. Additionally, stakeholder partnerships in all areas of endeavour have been a part of NEPA's mantra.

In going forward the Agency is overhauling its system of key performance indicators and targets, mindful of its mission, which is *‘to promote Sustainable Development by ensuring protection of the environment and orderly development in Jamaica through a highly motivated staff performing at the highest standard’*. End of quote

The Agency, though an executive agency of government, is not without challenges. The planning framework for the country is imperfect and we admit that more work needs to be done to reduce urban blight and curtail urban sprawl. Urban renewal, in the context of a green economy, is critical as it would help to reduce green-house gas emission, thus contributing to the reduction of climate change impacts. This type of action, though, requires partnerships and corporation at various levels of the society as we seek to achieve the goals of the Vision 2030. And I quote *‘to make Jamaica the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business’*. **End of quote.**

As the Agency embarks on its second decade, I urge us to reflect on the past while planning for the future. I take this opportunity to congratulate the CEO and staff, past and present, and thank the Authorities and Advisory Boards, past and present, for their contribution to the achievements of the Agency.

On this the occasion of our **11th Anniversary**, we continue to **seek the Lord's guidance "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord"** Psalm 150 vs. 6

In closing, let me remind us that the environment does not belong to any of us for as the Good Book says 'The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the World and they that dwell therein'. The Creator's desire for us is '**to prosper and be in good health**' (3rd John 1 verse 2).

So let us be good stewards and support NEPA towards its vision *'for a Jamaica where natural resources are used in a sustainable*

way and that there is a broad understanding of environment, planning and development issues with extensive participation amongst citizens and a high level of compliance with relevant legislation’.

Thank you!