

**SPEECH FOR
HON. ROBERT PICKERSGILL, M.P.
MINISTER OF WATER, LAND, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE,
AT THE
LAUNCH OF EARTH DAY ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL HOUSING TRUST (NHT)
ON
TUESDAY, APRIL 17, 2012 @ 1:00 P.M.**

Salutations!

Mr. Peter Knight, Chief Executive Officer, National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) and supporting partners including: the National Housing Trust (NHT); the Climate Change Adaptation & Disaster Risk Reduction Project; Panos Caribbean; National Environmental Education Committee/Voices for Climate Change;

representatives of the Office of Disaster Preparedness & Emergency Management (ODPEM); the National Solid Waste Management Authority (NSWMA); the Forestry Department; Environmental Foundation of Jamaica (EFJ); Jamaica Environment Trust (JET); Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust (JCDDT); members of the media; other invited guests – ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon!

I am pleased to be given this opportunity to launch the activities for **Earth Day 2012**. As you are aware, Earth Day is traditionally celebrated on April 22. It was started by United States Senator Gaylord Nelson back in the spring of 1970 **as a means of encouraging awareness at the grassroots level, of the need to protect the earth's resources.**

This year, Earth Day is being observed under the International theme: '**mobilize the earth**'. The local theme is: '**Let's Mobilize: Conserve, Protect and Recycle**'. The National Theme results from the combination of the international theme and that coined by the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica to celebrate Earth Day 2012. **The theme calls for organization and action and it points to the fact that everyone can make a difference.** By recycling material we reduce the pressure on natural resources and as a consequence conserve on finite resources. This action also protects our biological and water resources, for example, by avoidance of pollution.

This year, Earth Day activities are being undertaken in collaboration with the National Environmental Education Committee (NEEC)/Voices for Climate Change, in support of the European Union Climate Change Adaptation & Disaster Risk Reduction Project. Our partners have been invited to bring Earth Day activities under one banner as together more is achieved.

There will be several local activities planned to commemorate Earth Day during the period April 19 -22. I am informed that these activities will include, a seminar for the media from the western end of the island, together with a tour of one of our protected areas, the Montego Bay Marine Park. This type of activity is quite strategic as it provides new perspectives for the media whose members are critical communication partners for the good management of the environment.

The Outreach activities planned for some of our schools in western Jamaica will serve to remind our youth **of their emerging responsibility to the environment and the expanding challenges that their generation will face from climate change.**

Internationally, the call is for us to participate in a local Earth Day activity in order to **'collect a billion acts of green'** and to elevate environmental issues to national importance. Of course, environmental issues represent a huge national priority, which takes effect through the goals and mandate of my Ministry and several of its agencies such as the National Environmental Planning Agency (NEPA).

Education, both formal and non-formal, is one of the vehicles used to help realize the various environmental objectives. Indeed, one of the overarching goals of the National Sustainable Development Plan, guided by the vision ***'to make Jamaica the place to work, raise families and do business'***, is that of a healthy natural environment. **This year, national Earth Day activities include a focus on climate change, which is an important national imperative.**

As a small island developing State, Jamaica must quickly identify and pursue strategies to adapt to climate change.

Small developing countries like Jamaica and other nations in the region have contributed relatively little to the greenhouse gases that drive climate change but will bear the brunt of the effects of this phenomenon.

As Jamaicans we are feeling the impacts of climate change – Just ask our farmers, our fishermen, our coastal communities, our climate specialists and other scientists.

Scientists agree that with climate change come warmer seas that are damaging our coral reefs through a bleaching effect. This in turn has **implications for our fisheries and tourism product. The sea level rise associated with a changing climate threatens coastal infrastructure such as our hotels, our roads and important natural assets such as our beaches.** More intense tropical storms and hurricanes in recent years have taken lives and cost the country billions in damage.

More severe droughts threaten water and food security as do floods, if we consider the associated potential for water pollution.

I should point out that it is warmer temperatures which have helped the mosquito that carries dengue and yellow fever to breed faster in our region.

Let me assure you that the country is increasingly taking steps to integrate climate-proofing in our policies, planning process and programmes. A signal of my Administration's commitment is the inclusion of Climate Change as a specific ministerial portfolio responsibility and a national priority.

And so, I have appointed a climate advisory committee headed by Dr. Conrad Douglas together with scientists from academia, ministries, departments and agencies, civil society and Non Government Organizations. It is expected that this committee will grapple with the issues and present science-based advice to allow the government to execute activities which will place Jamaica at the forefront of climate change to become **RESPONSIVE** and **PROACTIVE** .

Communication in the area is also increasing through various initiatives by the Government, civil society, the private sector, our universities and international donor partners.

Similarly, widely available information in the media has helped inform more and more people about climate change and its impacts.

One of the outcomes in the National Development Plan indicates *that “We will incorporate climate change scenarios in future economic and land use planning and provide a framework to ensure that we reduce the risks associated with natural hazards by integrating hazard considerations into our country’s development planning,”* and outlines various sector strategies to address climate change adaptation.

This is a national commitment and ongoing communication is required at all levels to share information on climate change, its impacts and appropriate responses to the threats posed.

We must deepen the understanding of climate change and what will be required of us in order to build our resilience and adapt to it. It is also important that we all have access to information that is accurate, relevant and practical to individuals and to specific sectors.

Some of the activities being undertaken this week form part of the public education campaign for the Climate Change Adaptation & Disaster Risk Reduction Project which was launched in March on World Meteorological Day.

These activities are therefore in keeping with my mandate as the Minister with the responsibility for Climate Change to raise the level of awareness of the Jamaican people about its causes, the expected effects and impacts and how we must prepare ourselves to deal effectively with the eventualities in our various sectors and communities. Adequate information flow is therefore key to success in this area.

The Ministry of Water, Land, Environment and Climate Change fully supports the European Union and the United Nations Environment Programme's Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction Project – the project under which this campaign falls.

I must specially thank the European Union for funding this project which addresses not only public education, but also builds resilience for some of our coastal areas that are at risk from climate change.

I must commend the participating agencies - NEPA, the Planning Institute of Jamaica, the Forestry Department, the Met Office and the Environmental Management Division in my Ministry for their roles as co-managers of this project.

- The Environment Management Division and the Meteorological Service are implementing the public education and capacity building component of the project;
- The Forestry Department is working towards re-forestation in some watershed areas;
- and the National Environment Planning Agency which is engaged in building coastal resilience in selected areas. This component includes, among other activities:
 - Mangrove Forest Restoration,
 - Sea-grass Rehabilitation,
 - Beach Restoration; and
 - Artificial Reef installation.

I would also like to recognize the work of other donors such as the United Nations Development Programme, the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica and our various other partners who support climate change and other important areas of national development. I look forward, as well, to the wider climate change communication strategy to be developed under the Inter American Development Bank's Pilot Project on Climate Resilience.

I encourage the participation of all Jamaicans in these and other environmental activities, as each of us seeks to make a change in response to climate change and an improved environment overall.

I encourage you to help make Earth Day 2012 a success and to make every day an Earth Day! **Remember Psalm 24 Verse 1 “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein”.**

It is now my pleasure to officially launch the activities associated with Earth Day.

THANK YOU.
