



Organization of American States

**Ambassador Albert R. Ramdin
Assistant Secretary General**

**Remarks
at
Regional Workshop on Research and Development and
Capacity Building to Support Renewable Energy
Development
in the Caribbean**

Paramaribo – Suriname, October 19, 2011

Your Excellency Jim Hok, Minister of Natural Resources of the Republic of Suriname,
Mr. Ryan Sidin, Chairman of the Board of the Anton de Kom University of Suriname,
Colleagues at the Head Table,
Distinguished representatives of knowledge institutions, agencies and the private sector,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct honor and pleasure to welcome you all here to this Regional Workshop on Research and Development, and Capacity Building to support Renewable Energy Development in the Caribbean and even more delighted to welcome you in my home country Suriname.

I would like to thank the Honorable Minister of Natural Resources, Jim Hok and Dr. Ryan Sidin for hosting this critical workshop. Furthermore on behalf of the OAS we wish to express the gratitude to the CARICOM Energy Program Manager, Mr. Joseph Williams for taking the initiative to convene this gathering and being an engine for regional integration, and last but not least all distinguished guests from the wider Caribbean region.

This is the second time I am addressing a meeting on energy in one week. Last week I addressed the CREF meeting in Barbados. My presence at these meetings is to underscore the importance the

Organization of American States attaches to a sustainable energy scenario for the Hemisphere and the Caribbean in particular.

Energy is, without question, a key engine for development. If we as Caribbean citizens are to adequately address those challenges confronting our region – including those issues which are central to the OAS’ mission, including, economic development, equality, social exclusion and democracy – we must take a careful look at the energy situation in our region and hemisphere and support those initiatives that result in competitively priced, reliable, safe, and affordable sources of energy.

The Caribbean is blessed with natural resources and yet much of the hemisphere’s potential for renewable energy remains untapped. This includes some of the largest reserves of geothermal, biomass, solar, and wind potential. Our challenge here today, as senior lecturers, researchers and representatives of educational institutions of the Caribbean, is to facilitate a transition to a more sustainable energy reality in the Caribbean space, which makes use of all of our energy resources in a sustainable manner.

Small island states and low lying coastal states of the Caribbean, while benefiting from almost universal electricity coverage, face unique challenges in comparison to other regions in the Americas. These are related to affordability and sustainability of energy supplies. Most nations rely on imported fossil fuels to supply both their electricity and transportation needs. Such high dependence on

imported fossil fuels is taking a huge toll on these nations' economies and their financial management.

Climate change further exacerbates these challenges, causing sometimes drastic and destructive changes in weather patterns, including more frequent and intense hurricanes that may disrupt agricultural and livestock production cycles, and other essential infrastructure triggering financial losses and disruption of life.

These are just some of the energy related challenges facing the nations of the Caribbean of which we all are increasingly experiencing in our daily lives and need no convincing.

Now, overcoming them requires not only political will, but creativity, commitment and partnerships of all involved in bringing about awareness, knowledge and capacity among the Caribbean citizens. These challenges demand an holistic, inclusive and sustainable response; one that ensures the efficient use of our human resources and incentivizes the creation of a new generation of leaders, experts and trainers. Of importance is also the need to strengthen existing infrastructure, update legislation, and support innovative research.

If you'd ask me, how we should tackle the energy challenges facing our region? My first natural response would be... Education.... We, gathered here, have a critical responsibility to redouble our collective efforts to improve education for sustainable development. The Government of Suriname will be hosting in the first quarter of

next year two important ministerial encounters, that on education and on youth. I believe that these are important opportunities to channel some of your conclusions and recommendations on renewable energy.

Energy consumption has grown faster than the region's GDP, where our nations, should look into finding solutions to successfully decouple economic growth from energy inputs by increasing efficiency and productivity. We need regional experts with affinity and understanding of the region's challenges that can help us determine proper policies, initiatives and mechanisms to deploy innovative technologies to optimize the sustainable energy production and use. As many before have mentioned, "Let us not forget that a kilowatt saved is almost always cheaper than a kilowatt generated".

The nations in the Caribbean should pursue and promote integration of their energy systems to the extent possible. There are several valuable experiences in this area, all of them based on solidarity and complementarity, which are instructive for us.

From my observations at CREF, several countries are considering bilateral arrangements to interconnect their electricity systems; and there are discussions underway at the regional level, exploring the possibility of constructing an electricity grid covering multiple island states. The dream would be for a wide interconnection throughout the Caribbean, the materialization of this vision requires knowhow,

expertise and a very varied and diversified labor force with the adequate set of skills and preparation. This requires political will and commitment that go beyond just expressing concern and the need for change.

The premise behind this vision of a Caribbean wide physical electrical interconnection is that it will not only help the region stabilize its electricity markets, but by linking countries may facilitate the development of large scale renewable energy alternatives, geothermal and wind in small markets, for transfer to larger markets where new power is desperately needed. I am convinced that many laudable initiatives in the context of the Caribbean regional integration scheme, including the objective of food security, will not be realized if we do not have energy security.

Energy integration has the potential to boost economic development, encourage more efficient and rational use of resources and enhance member States' private sector capacity to market energy products and services where a considerable influx of qualified experts is needed.

The message that I want to leave behind is that I hope that today's and tomorrow's meetings will provide an opportunity for you to analyze new forms of cooperation between your respective institutions that can promote greater integration and to seek win-win solutions with your neighbors to confront our common energy challenges.

Although education and innovative business development alone will not solve all the challenges we face in developing renewable energy solutions, I believe it is the backbone of our future generation toward developing broader solutions to the energy challenges we face today and also demonstrate the region's openness to exploring the a wide array of alternatives.

In closing, I believe that all the nations and peoples in our Hemisphere should have access to clean, safe, sustainable energy for their development and their survival. Of course, your governments cannot and should not forgo developing the energy potential of your individual countries. But, I hope that we can all work together to do so in an environmentally sustainable and responsible manner, for the good of our children and their children, as well as for the good of our planet.

Thank you.