**MESSAGE FROM**

**THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM) SECRETARIAT**

**Launch of CARICOM Energy Month 2017**

Quisqueya University

Port au Prince, Haiti

30 October 2017

* Hon. Fritz Caillot, *Minister of Public Works, Transportation and Communication*
* Mr. Jacky Lumarque, *Rector, Quisqueya University*
* Dr. Everson Calixte, *Adviser on Energy to the President of the Republic of Haiti*
* Mr. Marc‑André Chrysostome, *Coordinator of the Energy Cell in the Ministry of Public Works, Transportation and Communication*
* Dr. René Jean‑Jumeau, *Executive Director of the Haiti Energy Institute*
* Other representatives from *Quisqueya University* and the *Government of Haiti*, our organizing partners in this initiative
* Representatives of the diplomatic corps, international development partner organizations and the private sector
* Brothers and sisters of the Caribbean Community

It gives me great pleasure to extend to you, a very warm welcome on behalf of the Secretary General of the CARICOM, in particular, and the CARICOM Secretariat, in general. The Secretariat is particularly pleased to be launching CARICOM Energy Month, which will be celebrated from November 1-30 throughout Member States, here in Haiti. The selection of Haiti as the hosts for the launch is significant as Haiti, which is the most recent Member State – joining the Community in 2002, accounts for two‑thirds of the population.

CARICOM Energy Month, celebrated in November of each year, is intended to serve as a period during which the entire Community – Secretariat, institutions and Member States of CARICOM – **take stock of the present state** and **realign the future outlook** as it relates to the pursuit of a sustainable energy pathway within our region. The Mini‑symposium fits appropriately within this framework and, through this event, it is envisioned that we will be able to identify opportunities, as we explore the potential solutions to some of the challenges that continue to retard progress on sustainable energy development in Haiti, in particular, and in the region, in general.

The Caribbean region contains predominantly Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which share a number of challenges and disadvantages in their sustainable development quest. In particular, our group of SIDS lives on the “front lines” of climate change and sustainable development. The complexity of climate change, and the projected impacts thereof, remains the **single biggest threat** to the sustainable development of our Caribbean countries and the cost of adaptation is already costing us significant amounts of money.

The recent spate of hurricanes – Irma, Jose and Maria, which impacted the Caribbean between August and September – has reshaped this year’s Energy Month agenda. Concomitant with these extreme weather events was the extensive damage to the electric grids and other critical infrastructure within the countries, which impacted the **availability of modern energy access**, albeit temporarily, to citizens in Dominica, the British Virgin Islands, the Bahamas, and other territories. This is one example of how our vulnerability to climate and disaster can retard advances that are made toward attainment of the global SDG’s: Goal 7 is related to an “access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all”.

A combination of observed trends, theoretical understanding of the climate system, and numerical modeling demonstrates that global warming is increasing the risk of these types of events today. The expectation is that extreme weather situations are expected to worsen in a future in which severe hurricanes are “the new normal”. Debates about whether single events are "caused" by climate change may continue, but individual events offer important lessons about our vulnerabilities to climate change.

The aim to “build back better” within the Caribbean context will require significant attention to be placed on the vulnerabilities of our islands. Our future lies in the **reduction of future risk** from extreme weather impacts, which requires adapting our economic, social and environmental systems to changes that are already unavoidable. **A strategic focus on energy, climate and disaster risk** as the central plank within our respective development models is needed, such that the efficient and cost‑effective production, delivery and use of renewable energy *decouple our development* from expensive fossil fuel use. In so‑doing, the energy system design can present an opportunity for enhancing the ability of our sectors (economic and social) to strategically address climate and disaster risks. The theme for CARICOM Energy Month, “**RE-Thinking Energy: Shaping a Resilient Community**” is intended to convey this message.

But a stark reality is that, in our current economic state, a majority of our countries have been experiencing very limited growth and are incapable of responding sufficiently to the climate threats.

Our islands face a vicious cycle of **severe climate impacts**, **high indebtedness** and **high fossil fuel import bills**. Over the last decade, high and generally unpredictable oil prices have consistently compromised the efforts of our Governments to stimulate economic growth in the productive sectors and have been a significant contributor to the high levels of indebtedness. Simultaneously, the impact of disasters – floods, landslides and hurricanes – have consistently eroded the modest economic gains made by many of our countries and, in instances, exacerbated the debt situation. The consequence is that the high levels of indebtedness faced by our countries and the periodic loss of significant portions of national GDPs to disasters limit the ability of our governments to make the investments that are necessary to transform the energy portfolios of the islands and to invest in resilience.

A critical fact too is that the transformation of energy markets in CARICOM requires every Member State to mobilize large amounts of capital; for the power systems alone, an estimated total of US$ 20 billion is required over the next 5-10 years. Within the “confluence of circumstances” that face the region, from where are the investments, which are required to shift our energy systems away from the traditional, legacy designs to modern, smart and resilient designs, which are capable of more effectively supporting the sustainable development needs of our islands, likely to come?

As a case in point, prior to the passage of Hurricane Maria, Dominica was on the verge of reaching financial closure for the construction of geothermal power plant that could reduce the country’s dependence on fossil‑based electricity by 50%. Now the government is faced with the priority of supporting its citizens, all of whom have been impacted, with food, water, shelter and other basic needs.

Even before Irma and Maria, many of our countries were struggling to overhaul outdated power plants and reduce their heavy reliance on imported oil, as well as improving the fragile electric grids that exist in many instances. The situation in Haiti – a Member State that constitutes two thirds of the Caribbean Community by population – is one to which closer attention should be paid. The limited penetration of electricity in Haiti translates into 50% of CARICOM citizens without access to clean, modern energy services. The regional strategy on energy would not have served its purpose if the energy circumstance of some of our most vulnerable citizens is not suitably addressed.

There is general agreement among industry experts that the establishment of a robust investment environment that attracts “affordable capital” is necessary for the enabling of meaningful and transformational reform within the CARICOM energy sector. Global experience has shown that an availability of public capital is critical to the stimulation of private investments within the sustainable energy sector. Amid surging interest in renewables, there is recognition of the need for governments to play a very active role in promoting and guiding the energy transition.

The linkages between *sustainable energy* and *sustainable development* are clear. The economic, social and environmental resilience that is targeted by the CARICOM Five Year Strategic Plan can be derived from suitably designed energy systems, and projects that can positively contribute to such areas as environmental protection, water production and food security. The catalytic role of the energy sector has become evident too for other socioeconomic issues, such as the enabling of education, health and sustainable agriculture, and creating jobs.

Within the context of the region’s natural constraints and economic challenges, which limits our ability to mobilize the domestic resources that are necessary for promoting the sustainable energy investments, shifts within the global development assistance and climate financing systems should acknowledge and target the specificities and vulnerabilities of SIDS. The Green Climate Fund can provide reliable access to overseas development financing and concessionary loans to support investments for climate adaptation and mitigation, including sustainable energy actions. Further, “Debt for Climate swaps”, which focus on clean energy investments, has the potential to be transformative and deserve serious consideration. Taken together, these two actions have the potential to provide significant amounts of the public capital that is needed to kick‑start the growth cycle and support the sustainable future that we desire. Combating climate change, promoting sustainable development and addressing the energy challenges of our countries requires, *among other things*, strong partnerships.

Chair, we are grateful to the Government of Haiti for partnering with the CARICOM Secretariat in launching the 2017 CARICOM Energy Month. Oftentimes, societies can point back to the formative moments or events that shaped where they are today and, when looking back, can easily see how the moments or events triggered what followed.

The Secretariat intends to work together with the Government of Haiti to ensure that, when viewed in hindsight, this event will be recognized as one of those decisive moments when our commitment to stronger cooperation on energy set us on the path for the sustainable growth and prosperity that is necessary for us to master our social and economic challenges.

Together, we can make significant advances in providing secure, efficient and cost‑efficient supplies of energy that can sustainably power the future of this region, this nation and its people.

*I thank you.*

**Dr. Devon Gardner**

Head, Energy Unit