

PRESS RELEASE
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8th High Level Session Ministerial Forum

Nine Caribbean Ministers Sign Declaration for Addressing Regional Water Security



Caribbean Ministers with responsibility for water resources management are seen here signing a declaration endorsing key recommendations for addressing regional water security at the 8th High Level Session Ministerial Forum convened by the Global Water Partnership-Caribbean (GWP-C) and its partner the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association (CWWA) on October 5th, 2012 in The Bahamas.

Nine (9) Caribbean Ministers with responsibility for water resources management have committed themselves to making all essential efforts in addressing water security and climate change in the region. This assurance came out of the 8th Annual High Level Session (HLS) Ministerial Forum in The Bahamas, held on October 4th and 5th, 2012. The Ministerial Forum is a joint initiative of the Global Water Partnership-Caribbean (GWP-C) and its partner, the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association (CWWA); and is an unmatched regional event, being the only meeting of Water Ministers in the Caribbean to date.

Critical to the declaration signed by the Ministers at the Forum was their recognition that high level political leadership is key for meeting water security and climate change challenges faced by Caribbean countries. This along with other recommendations recognising the importance of building a water secure Caribbean, were sanctioned by the Ministers from The Bahamas, Anguilla, Barbados, Belize, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Jamaica, Nevis, St. Kitts, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Also deemed imperative by the Ministers was that Caribbean governments in collaboration with regional partners should conduct national assessments on the status of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) implementation in the Caribbean and keep the implementation of IWRM under continuous review.

During the 8th HLS, Ministers and senior government officials were able to give their perspectives on national and regional priorities for water security in the Caribbean; as well as discuss regional water resource coordination at the Ministerial level. Some of the main issues brought to the fore in their discussions were the need for greater focus on IWRM; disaster risk reduction; closer integration of the water sector with other sectors; access to water; water tariffs; the need for more water experts in the region; raising water conservation consciousness at the national and regional level;

looking into various water technologies to control resources; the use of rainwater harvesting as a mitigation practice; water's impact on health; climate change being key to addressing water security; among other issues.

The Honourable Margarito Gaspar Vega, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and Agriculture of Belize, noted his country's efforts to move toward an IWRM approach to managing water, citing legislation passed in Belize in 2010 to introduce an IWRM Act.

The concern of climate change was repeatedly raised by the Honourable Robert Pickersgill, Minister of Water, Land, Environment and Climate Change of Jamaica, who saw climate change as one of the most critical issues to be addressed in relation to water security. This sentiment was endorsed by Dr. The Honourable David Estwick, Minister of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and Water Resource Management of Barbados who gave support to building climate change resilience but advised that a lot of preliminary work should first be done nationally to better understand how water and other sectors such as sanitation are integrated. He pointed out that it is crucial that national research is conducted for Caribbean countries to be fully aware of the status of their water resources.

On the other hand, the Honourable Carlisle Powell, Minister of Communications, Works, Public Utilities, Post, Physical Planning, Natural Resources and Environment of Nevis stressed that as a region, the Caribbean needs to do more in promoting and communicating the importance of water conservation. He explained that there is a dire need to educate communities on conserving water and reporting leaks.

Despite varying national priorities on water amongst the Ministers, there was a consensus that similar water resource challenges are faced in their respective countries and a clear means of moving forward on these issues should be decided. The Ministers through their discussions and informed technical inputs from national, regional and international agencies such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute (CEHI), the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); among others agreed on seven (7) critical concerns toward achieving national and regional water security. These areas include water as a national development issue; Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM); climate change and water; wastewater; regional cooperation; capacity building; and public awareness.

The recommendations coming out of the 8th HLS were signed on October 5th, 2012 by the Honourable Philip E. Brave Davis, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Works and Urban Development of The Bahamas; the Honourable Evans Gumbs, Minister for Infrastructure, Communications, Utilities, Housing, Agriculture and Fisheries of Anguilla; Dr. The Honourable David Estwick, Minister of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and Water Resource Management of Barbados; the Honourable Margarito Gaspar Vega, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and Agriculture of Belize; the Honourable Reginald Austrie, Minister of Lands, Housing, Settlements and Water Resource Management of the Commonwealth of Dominica; the Honourable Robert Pickersgill, Minister of Water, Land, Environment and Climate Change of Jamaica; the Honourable Carlisle Powell, Minister of Communications, Works, Public Utilities, Post, Physical Planning, Natural Resources and Environment of Nevis; Dr. The Honourable Earl Asim Martin, Minister of Housing, Public Works, Energy and Public Utilities of St. Kitts; and the Honourable Clayton Burgin, Minister of Health, Wellness and the Environment of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Global Water Partnership-Caribbean (GWP-C) and its partner the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association (CWWA) are committed to supporting the realisation of the recommendations coming out of the 8th High Level Session (HLS) Ministerial Forum, in cooperation with regional governments and other partners.

For more information contact:

Ms. Gabrielle Lee Look
Communications Officer, Global Water Partnership-Caribbean (GWP-C)
Tel: +868 622 3117; Fax: +868 622 1589; E-mail: gleelook@gwp-caribbean.org