



MESSAGE FROM H.E. AMBASSADOR JOHN W. ASHE, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP OF 77, TO THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE IPS SUPPORT GROUP ANNUAL MEETING (The Hague, The Netherlands, 23 October 2008)

Distinguished Participants,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is deeply regrettable that I was not able to be here in person to address you in my capacity as Chair of the Group of 77, at this Inter Press Service Support Group Annual Meeting on the theme: "Strategies to preserve and increase the support base for global sustainable development - The role of the media."

However I hope that via this message you can accept our appreciation and encouragement for IPS mission in promoting issues of importance to developing countries. I also wish to congratulate Mr. Mario Lubetkin, Director-General of IPS, for his outstanding leadership and remarkable vision.

The Group of 77 appreciates greatly the fruitful partnership that we have developed over the years with IPS. We view this partnership as a way of utilizing communications as a powerful tool in raising international awareness on the issues of development and integrating these uses into the core of its message. We are highly confident that the continuous effort of IPS will help to increase the international community's understanding of and support for sustainable development in particular in countries vulnerable to external shocks.

I would like now to express some views on the topic: "The impact of Climate Change on Food Security: New Stories and new dilemmas in the South and in the North".

Climate Change, its adverse impacts and associated phenomena, poses serious risks and challenges particularly to developing countries. The impacts are already being experienced in a number of areas, few more so that in agriculture, forestry and fisheries with consequential adverse effects on food production, security, rural economies, and health. They threaten sustainable development, generally and sustainable rural development in particular.

Agricultural advancements, including in crops and production systems, over the past 50 years have led to dramatic increases in crop yields. However, many of these crops are not fully adapted to the new environmental changes. They are also dependent on solar radiation, temperature, and precipitation which are the main drivers of crop growth. IPCC findings show that global climate change will cause higher global temperatures, changed hydrological regimes, and increased climatic variability.

The science is now clear. The level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is sufficient to fuel climate change for years. The actual extent of the change, the manifestations of the change as among droughts, floods, melting icecaps, etc., might still be scientifically uncertain but occurrence of a range of these impacts is certain. The fact that there will be extreme impacts on agricultural production, crop yields and more broadly on our biodiversity and rural development are certain.

Numerous papers have been produced by the FAO, IPCC and others about the grave and long-term impacts that climate change could have on crop yields, marine and livestock productivity, cropping cycles and animal migration especially in tropical and sub-tropical areas. Some of these impacts could be positive especially for subtropical areas as the higher temperatures could allow for the cultivation of new crops. The science is, however, still unclear on these potential benefits. The majority of the more likely negative impacts which will threaten food security will be felt in tropical areas. These regions provide home for some of the world's most vulnerable people the majority of whom reside in developing countries.

Further, the climate change crisis is now interacting with a number of other crises and challenges - food security, energy availability, sustaining economic development, social development, and environmental protection. These are overwhelming both the technological and financial capacity of developing countries to adapt within the required short timeframe. International cooperation is required.

The media has a unique and multidimensional role in action to address these challenges. First, it has a role, some would say a responsibility, to understand the nature and interconnectivity of these challenges and then to communicate the seriousness and urgency without causing undue panic. We stress in particular the interconnectedness. A country which seeks, for example, to solve energy problem by tapping into new sources of fossil-based energy feedstock could well be adding to the buildup of greenhouse gases and hence to floods and droughts in other countries or in the same country. The media's education function based on information over time and across space would allow for better understanding.

Second, accurate communication is essential to conveying the urgency of the action and the long-term potential recurrent nature of some challenges. A small country, for example, which must regularly replace critical infrastructure, is not necessarily being useful and efficient.

Third, the message of the importance of movement on all three pillars of sustainable development: economic development, social development and environmental protection in a balanced manner even in situations of constrained resources, need to be conveyed consistently in a credible manner.

Fourth and finally, these messages that all are threatened when one area of the world is threatened need to be conveyed. The contribution to a solution is thus not charity but self-protection.

In this latter regard, the international community pledged on several occasions to contribute to resolution of mitigation and adaptation to climate change issues but has failed to follow-through. The media has the capacity to monitor performance.

In conclusion, we believe that the media can play a significant role as a global voice in providing accurate, impartial, comprehensive and timely information to the international community and to hold the international community to its commitments and responsibilities thereby contributing to long-term solutions.

Thank you.