

CARIBBEAN YOUTH ENVIRONMENT NETWORK

PREAMBLE

Leaders and appropriately authorised persons representing seventeen environmental youth groups from across the Wider Caribbean assembled for the first Annual Caribbean Youth Environment and Development Congress in Plymouth, Montserrat (15-19 November, 1993). During the event the leaders ratified the role and function of the Caribbean Youth Environment Network (CYEN) and developed a charter specifically to consolidate, guide and support the continued development of the CYEN. The charter was named ***THE PLYMOUTH UNDERSTANDING***. This document shall be signed by all youth organisations desirous of being a part of the CYEN. They shall abide by the general principals therein, whilst maintaining their right to full autonomy. The Plymouth Understanding shall be reviewed every three years and amendments made through majority consensus where necessary.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Caribbean Youth Environment Network is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of Caribbean youth by facilitating their personal development and promoting their full involvement in all matters pertaining to the environment and sustainable development. The organisation promotes education and training, Caribbean integration and community empowerment as tools to develop an ethic amongst young people that assists in the conservation and protection of natural resources within the Wider Caribbean.

THE PLYMOUTH UNDERSTANDING

Background

The Caribbean region is undoubtedly experiencing the depletion and degradation of its natural resources at an unacceptably rapid rate. The situation is exacerbated by:

- Limited land size and the fragility of island ecosystems.
- Heavy dependence on natural resources to sustain the main sectors of the Caribbean economies, specifically tourism and agriculture.
- The over utilisation and destruction of biological resources as a direct result of population growth, inappropriate life style practices, increasing levels of unemployment and cost of living.
- The emergence of new economic trading blocks which have the potential to further marginalise the Caribbean.
- The apparent inability of the leadership of the Caribbean region to adequately influence global decision making processes.

The major environmental issues of concern to the Caribbean region pertain to:

- Solid waste management
- Sewage disposal
- Coastal zone degradation
- Agro-chemical pollution of ground and surface water resources
- The depletion of biological resources.

Individual Caribbean governments have been making attempts to grapple with these problems. However, such attempts have not obtained the desired results because of the failure to harmoniously integrate environmental issues and developmental policies. Many non-governmental organizations have dedicated significant portions of their time and energies to address the aforementioned problems. However, their effectiveness has been hampered in many cases by financial constraints and lack of meaningful governmental cooperation. Such splintered uncoordinated efforts by Caribbean governments and non-governmental organisations are insufficient to address the environmental problems of the region.

Justification

In the Caribbean, youth constitute over 35% of the population. Yet their participation in the decision making process and the shaping of the future is, in the main, disregard by the existing systems of governance. Although attempts have been made at creating an atmosphere which would encourage the involvement of youth in such processes, the methodologies have been questionable. Reference can be made to 1985 which was declared by the United Nations as the International Year of the Youth. Its objective was to highlight the state of the World's youth and to mobilise them to positive action. Although this avenue was created, the socio-economic, political and cultural status of youth remains virtually unchanged. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Brazil during 1992, created and documented a vast action programme specifically designed to guide global development into the twenty first century. This document called Agenda 21 was agreed to by a total of 105 heads of state of government and high level representatives of virtually every nation on earth. Chapter 25 of Agenda 21 entitled, "Children and youth in sustainable development", clearly establishes the need to involve and address youth in global sustainable development. Youth related issues are also documented in chapters 3, 5, 6, 18, 27, 33, and 36. The extents to which youth issues permeate this document indicate the importance of the youth sector to the sustainable development process and to society in general.

It has been said that, "youth will inherit the Earth", in response to this we as Caribbean youth are asking for the appropriate assistance through which we can make our inheritance a reality. We believe that the effectiveness of such assistance can be significantly increased through collaboration within an institutionalised network of existing youth organizations in the Caribbean.

