

# OECS Young Citizens calling for action

**– ‘Climate Change is not just idle talk, but a threat to our future!’**

**IT HAS JUST ABOUT BECOME IMPOSSIBLE to read a newspaper, watch television or listen to the radio for a 24-hour period without hearing about climate change. The whole thing sounds a bit worrying but, despite all of the information, the phenomenon is still confusing, and the ordinary young person of the Caribbean does not quite know what to expect from climate change, when it will happen, what they can do about it, or how it will affect future generations.**

So let us start at the beginning. What is climate change? “It is a change in climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.” Of course, this is an official definition, but in a nutshell, it means that the weather patterns that we have come to expect year after year in the Caribbean, will change and will no longer be as predictable as before.

The science that explains what is currently happening in our atmosphere and how it affects the oceans, the land and all life on Earth is sound. So we can brace ourselves for warmer days, shorter but heavier episodes of rainfall, longer and more intense droughts, stronger hurricanes, rising sea levels, and other new phenomena such as ocean acidification.

The rising sea levels should set off the alarms in our heads, given that most of us in the small islands and territories of the OECS live in low-lying coastal areas. Our

homes, roads, ports and all buildings in these areas will be under threat of being washed away by rising seas and more powerful storm surges. Truth be told, everything will be affected, from fishing to agriculture and tourism. Our traditional livelihoods and our way of life will be disrupted in one way or another. It will be a future laced with uncertainty. Already we are witnessing deaths from heat stroke, as happened in India and Pakistan this year, and more incidence of diseases transmitted by vectors.

Life is unlikely to be a bed of roses for us young people of the OECS region, in the face of an environmental backlash. So many things we as young citizens in the OECS cherish so dearly such as carnival, entertainment and sports, will not be the same if climate change continues unabated. It is almost unimaginable jumping carnival or playing 90 minutes of football in 40 degree heat. So for us young citizens, finding ways to avoid these horrific scenarios is important, as this is the future that we are facing. They have in the past been making efforts to have our voices and opinions heard by the governments of the OECS, as our leaders negotiate with the international community to reduce global emissions of carbon dioxide through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process.

Organisations like the Caribbean Youth Environment Network (CYEN) have been engaging the region’s young citizens and

making an impact on the international arena, to make our fellow young citizens aware of climate change; and now, we want our leaders to heed our pain, our anxiety, our plight, and listen to us. Here it is.

This coming December, at the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP 21) in Paris, the OECS, Caribbean and the world will once again sit down to develop a plan to minimise the effects of climate change in coming years. It will not be an easy task, as countries will have different agendas and priorities, and the plan must be agreeable to everyone. A very tall ask. However, for the people and the youth of the Caribbean, our very survival could depend on the outcome of these talks, and so we need you the leaders to take firm positions to ensure that our nations are not further compromised. We as young citizens would follow the events closely to ensure that their interests and concerns are being taken into consideration.

Young people were born into this climate change debacle, we did not create it. It was the adults of this and previous generations who did; but clearly we will suffer the consequences of their actions. Our countries are already under economic stress, and the scarce resources presently available will now have to be shared in the development of projects to adapt to climate change, rather than on programmes to assist the development of youth and broader society. The levels of unemployment in the Caribbean and in particular the OECS, are



OECS Young Citizens have shown serious concern for climate change.

already high and, with the expected negative impacts of climate change on livelihoods, further job losses can be expected. Undoubtedly then, it is our young citizens that will disproportionately feel the socio-economic pinch. Further, maybe jobs that we come to know, like being a fisherman, may not even be a viable option for us...So leaders, we are worried!

What do we the young people from the OECS region want in an agreement at the Paris Conference? We want Global temperature rise

to be kept below 1.5 degrees Centigrade, for the global community to have the ability to place sanctions on countries that surpass their CO2 emission quota, and for greater emphasis to be placed on improving the current rate of energy transition from fossil fuels to cleaner forms of renewable energy. But perhaps most important of all, our young citizens want governments of the OECS and the Caribbean to create the opportunities for us to be able to participate, to contribute our ideas, our thoughts and

solutions to the climate change debate. It is only fair, as the future belongs to us, and we are crying out to be taken seriously.

**This article is written by the Young Citizens of the Caribbean Youth Environment Network (CYEN) in association with Mr. Reginald Burke of CYEN and Dr. Asha Singh of the OECS Commission. The article is produced as part of the Working Partnership on Climate Change Initiative (WPCC) supported by the Government of France.**

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