



Remarks by Senator Hon. Dr. James Fletcher

Minister for Public Service, Sustainable Development,

Energy, Science and Technology

Government of Saint Lucia

IDEAS Energy Innovation Contest 2012 Press Launch

17th February, 2012

Bay Gardens Hotel

Gros Islet, Saint Lucia

Salutation

- Mr. Karl Burrows – Resident British Commissioner
- Mr. Thomas Scheutzlich – CREDP/GIZ
- Ms. Helen Pipins
- Mr. Ken Aldonza – Previous Prize Winner
- Invited Guests
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

Introduction

I am pleased to be here today, on behalf of the Government of Saint Lucia, supporting the launch of the third IDEAS Energy Innovation Contest. As we have been informed, the goal of this initiative is to support the development of innovative projects that promote renewable energies and improve energy efficiency. These project ideas can focus on the adoption, innovation, assimilation, development and transfer of technologies in renewable energy, energy efficiency, climate change mitigation and fossil fuel substitution.

Why is this initiative important? Permit me to briefly indicate a few of the reasons I believe this is deserving of our support.

Influence on our Energy Profile

First of all, from an energy perspective, countries like ours here in Saint Lucia are characterized by a near total dependency on diesel for electricity generation. This fact, together with the small and insular nature of our electricity systems, has driven average electricity tariffs in the OECS to approximately US cents 40 per KWh, which represents a considerable challenge to small, open economies like we have in Saint Lucia. The impact of an increase in the price of oil on electricity generation cost is significantly higher in the OECS than it is in most countries in the wider Latin America and Caribbean region.

A US\$10 increase in the price of oil has been estimated to translate into a growth of electricity generation cost equivalent to 1.5% of the GDP of our OECS Member States. This indicates the clear need for governments like ours to reduce our total dependence on fossil fuel for electricity generation and provide ourselves with a buffer against the next inevitable increases in the world price of oil.

Despite the relative smallness of our electricity generation systems, which range from 9MW in Nevis to 49MW in Saint Lucia, we have managed to record steady growth in capacity, generation and fuel consumption over the

last 15 or so years. Growth in electricity demand in our region is projected to increase at a rate of 3-4% per annum, and this will be driven mostly by the commercial and residential sectors in our tourism led-economies. Clearly, with demand projected to continue to increase in the foreseeable future and with the price of oil also projected to increase, an initiative such as this one that focuses the minds of our creative thinkers and scientists on increasing energy efficiency and making greater use of renewable sources of energy is worthy of support.

Impact on Climate Change

The second reason I am here supporting this activity has to do with Climate Change. In addition to having responsibility for energy, my portfolio also includes Sustainable Development, under which this very critical subject falls.

This initiative, by seeking to reduce on our use of fossil fuels for electricity generation, is playing a not insignificant part in drawing attention to the issue of climate change, and more importantly, is encouraging the development of technologies and innovative solutions that may lead to a reduction of our carbon footprint.

Without going into details of the science of climate change, I would like to draw your attention to some relevant information.

The first is that our planet is currently going through a significant warming trend. Each of the last eleven years, 2000 to 2011, features as one of the twelve warmest years since we started keeping records in 1880. It follows, therefore, that the decade 2000 to 2009 was the warmest on record. Sea surface temperature trends over the Caribbean exceed, and at some locations nearly double those being observed over the global tropical oceans. In most countries in CARICOM, total annual rainfall is expected to decrease by up to 20%, with larger reductions of up to 30% predicted at the 2°C threshold. The Caribbean is projected to experience greater sea level rise than most areas in the world. For countries such as ours, where the greatest proportion of our economic and social infrastructure, not to mention our human settlements, is located along the coast, the implications of this are obvious and enormous.

Therefore, an initiative like this one, which seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and our carbon footprint, is most definitely one that requires our support.

Congruence with the Policies of our Government

The third reason for our Government's support of this initiative is even simpler and easier to explain. Pages 60 to 63 of the Blueprint for Growth, the 2012 Elections Manifesto of our Government, clearly articulate our policies on climate change and energy. You will find, if you take the time to read this document, as I would highly recommend, that several of these policies find resonance in the goals of the IDEAS Energy Innovation Contest.

Support for Innovation

The final reason for my ready acceptance to speak at the launch of this contest has to do with my own training in science. This contest encourages innovation, but even more importantly, it does so through its promotion of science and technology. I do not believe it is necessary for me to explain further why someone with a background in science, heading a Ministry responsible for Energy, Science and Technology, would be attracted to a contest of this nature.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to commend UKAID from the Department of International Development (DFID), the Global Village Energy Partnership, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the South Korean Government for the support that will make possible an award of up to US\$200,000 to the best individual enterprise and applied technology project.

May the most innovative and practicable solution win!

I thank you.