

REMARKS BY DOUGLAS R. ORANE,
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NATIONAL CHURCH SERVICE
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(to be read by Mr. Gilroy Graham)

Greetings.

One of the most pressing issues on President Barrack Obama's agenda is that of global warming. Ten years ago this would not have been considered a topic that should concern the leader of the most powerful country in the world. In fact, up to the turn of the century there were probably far more skeptics than people who gave any credence to the concept of global warming. And, even today there continues to be many well-read, highly intelligent people who ridicule the idea. However, we in the Caribbean have experienced the effects of global warming first hand with the greater frequency and increased intensity of the hurricanes which have battered our islands in the past decade. With these have come massive destruction of property and major loss of life, particularly in neighbouring Haiti.

Global figures show that women and children are the most vulnerable in the face of the disasters. An estimated 650,000 people were affected by back-to-back hurricanes in Haiti in 2008. Three hundred thousand, almost half of the people affected, were children. A major consequence of the hurricane and flood damage is the ability of children to attend school. We in Jamaica are very aware of that. School buildings are generally drawn into use as hurricane shelters. Very often people remain in these shelters long after the hurricanes have passed, preventing children from returning to school and resulting in the loss of many hours of learning.

The impact of environmental degradation will have far more serious consequences for our children and grandchildren. This is a clear instance in which the "iniquities of the fathers" will be visited "on the children and upon the children's children". Today's generation, in particular those of us who have responsibility for policy and decision-

making today regarding the physical development of our country, will determine the quality of life of future Jamaicans. It is with this in mind that the Child Month Committee decided to adopt the theme “Preserve the Environment; Protect Our Children” to guide the 2009 Child Month Programme.

It is acknowledged by those of us who have travelled widely and by the millions of visitors who visit our island every year that Jamaica is one of the most beautiful places in the world. When I drive through countryside and observe the outstanding beauty of our island I sometimes think that the Garden of Eden must have been very much like Jamaica. We enjoy majestic mountains covered in areas by lush green vegetation, cascading waterfalls, wide plains, undulating rivers and a few pristine beaches may still be found along our shoreline that is lapped by the Caribbean Sea. Just last week while we celebrated Earth Day I learnt of the many species of birds that are endemic to our island, which means that they are found nowhere else in the world, only in Jamaica. We also boast many endemic plants.

However, while still very beautiful, Jamaica is not nearly as beautiful as it was 50 years ago. Over this period the environment has suffered significant degradation and continues to do so daily from lack of planning and poor land use. Inefficient use of resources, such as water, is another major problem. We in Jamaica might believe that there is an infinite supply of water, but there isn't. We have indeed been very fortunate in that we have not reached the stage of several Caribbean neighbours who have to remove the salt from sea water to provide potable water. In fact desalination technology is a growing sector in the Caribbean. Our coastal waters have been polluted by oil spills, sewage and industrial waste; our ground water has also been polluted by red mud waste; we suffer from land erosion and deforestation and many species of our plant and animal life are now endangered.

Admittedly, development and progress will require exploitation of our land and natural resources, and Jamaica is determined to make its place in the modern world. But, our development must be achieved in such a way as to ensure minimal negative impact on our environment. We owe this to our children and grandchildren who deserve to live in a Jamaica that continues to be one of the most exquisite countries in the world.

Children of Jamaica, you also have a role to play in protecting your legacy. Remember that Jesus himself pointed to the power and wisdom of children when he told the many people who constantly sought his teachings “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein” (Luke 18: 17). Our children, who are most vulnerable to environmental problems, need to learn as much about how to protect and conserve the environment as they can so as to teach their parents and the adults around them to respect the fact that the environment is not indestructible and our actions impact on the health and sustainability of the surroundings in which we live.

While policy makers have a large share of responsibility for the protection of our land, each of us as individuals has a role to play. However, many people are not sure about what to do. Our churches and schools can help in this regard by establishing environmental clubs through which students and members of the congregation can be educated. I am well aware that there are already many such clubs in existence in Jamaica, but I believe that many more need to take up the challenge of doing their part to protect Jamaica, land we love.

The beauty of nature has been a consistent source of inspiration for writers, painters, lyricists and creative people throughout the ages. One of these was King David, author of the Psalms. Few people would disagree that Psalm 23 is one of the most well-loved and inspirational of all the Psalms. The opening lines paint one of the most graphic and exquisite pictures in literature.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures
He leadeth me beside the still waters
He restoreth my soul
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness

In these lines King David showed his appreciation for the fact that the environment provided food for the soul as well as the body. Jamaica abounds in green pastures and clear sparkling waters. Let us, in the interest of our children endeavour to preserve the environment of our island home.

I commend the Child Month Committee on the selection of this year's theme "Preserve the Environment; Protect Our Children". It is timely and it highlights an area of child protection that we tend to ignore in our pursuit of short-term economic benefits.

We pray for God's blessings on the work of the National Child Month Committee as they prepare to implement their programme for 2009 and are grateful for the opportunity of enjoying the fellowship of this morning's service.