



**PERMANENT MISSION OF JAMAICA  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**STATEMENT BY**

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE FLOYD E. MORRIS  
PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE**

**AT THE  
FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT**

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*Please check against delivery*

Mr. President,

Colleagues,

Excellencies,

It is always a pleasure to participate on occasions such as this where we as presiding officers can meet to examine the issues that affect us and our respective legislatures, especially to discuss parliamentary involvement in the implementation of the new Sustainable Development Goals.

The new international development agenda that has been painstakingly negotiated through an inclusive and comprehensive process over the past three years aims to ensure sustainable development for all. The SDGs, which form the core of the post-2015 development agenda, are set to be universal and inclusive and chart the course for the years ahead. We as parliamentarians have a unique and important role to play in ensuring implementation and accountability in the quest for sustainable development.

I add my voice not just as a parliamentarian from a small-island developing state but also as someone who is a person with a disability. According to the World Health Organization's 2010 *World Report on Disability*, one in seven persons or over one billion people experience some form of disability.

Persons with disabilities often face prejudice from others in society who feel that a disability *dis*-ables a person. This situation is compounded in small-island developing states where lack of resources pushes members of the disabled community to the margins of society. We as a community have had to deal with such issues as lack of access, diminished educational opportunities and overall exclusion from society. I am one of the fortunate ones. I was determined to be the best I could be and with the assistance of caring individuals who looked beyond my disability and saw my potential, I was able to make the most of educational opportunities that others take for granted. It is this educational opportunity, coupled with faith in me from the current political directorate of Jamaica, that caused me to become the first blind person in my country to become a Minister of State in 2001 and now President of the Jamaican Senate. But we as a community should not have to depend on the goodwill of others for our empowerment. There should be adequate systems in place to ensure that every person with a disability can achieve their potential to the fullest.

Attitudes are changing and more and more the world is coming to see that persons with disabilities are "*differently abled*". The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, was the first global treaty to specifically address the rights of persons with disabilities and I am proud that Jamaica was the first country to ratify this important instrument. In the past year as we seek to implement our obligations under the Convention, the Jamaican parliament took the significant step of passing our landmark Disabilities Act with broad bipartisan support. The Act comprehensively addresses the rights, needs and development aspirations of persons with disabilities in Jamaica.

While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) and their resultant targets focused on issues that do affect members of the disabled community, they did not articulate a clear enough recognition of the unique socioeconomic needs of persons with disabilities.

Jamaica is pleased that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be adopted at the UN Summit in this very room in a few days are more expansive and inclusive. They seek to impact not just the physical but also the socioeconomic development of all people. Persons with disabilities have received special attention within the Goals which will seek to create a framework for the empowerment of this community.

The proposed SDGs recognise that persons with disabilities deserve to have their special learning needs met and that there should be no one size fits all approach in the field of education in Goal 4. They also acknowledge in Goal 8 that persons with disabilities are employable and can make meaningful contributions to development at the community, national and global levels. Goal 11 on sustainable cities gives special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

I believe that the SDGs when properly implemented will go a far way in ameliorating the condition of persons with disabilities not just in developing states but across the globe. Moreover, the SDGs have the potential, when effectively implemented, to transform the lives of millions of our citizens, safeguard our shared environment and build a world of peace and prosperity.

We as parliamentarians have a key role to play and I call upon all of us in this august body, to give fulsome support to the adoption and implementation of the SDGs and to make life more meaningful for all our people across the globe.

I thank you!