

Remarks of Ambassador Dwight C.R. Gardiner on the occasion of the launch of the UWI Five Islands, Centre for Oceanography and the Blue Economy at the SIDS 4 Conference

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

It is my pleasure to address you this afternoon at this auspicious launch of the Centre of Excellence for Oceanography and the Blue Economy (COBE) which is based here in Antigua, as Chair of the Antigua and Barbuda National Ocean Governance Committee, which is comprised of representatives of the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies across the Government which have responsibility for ocean related matters.

The COBE is a result of years of collaborative effort on the part of our government agencies and our academic and international partners to create an institution that can support and catalyse the ocean governance regime of the region by creating avenues for capacity building, academic research and science that can drive and shape policies across the Caribbean.

For Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the ocean is our lifeblood, it is the means by which we ensure food security, sustainable economic growth, the livelihood, and wellbeing of our people. It also represents a large untapped potential that can offer new opportunities for ensuring resilient prosperity through blue economic ventures.

As island people, particularly in the Caribbean context, we understand the need for integration, collaboration, and cooperation in ocean governance. We recognise the imperative to move away from siloed thinking and fragmented management in the governance of the one ocean we all inhabit. Through regional coordination initiatives such as the Eastern Caribbean Region Ocean Policy (ECROP) within the smaller grouping of the OECS member States, and broader initiatives which stimulate sound ocean coordination mechanisms for the wider Caribbean such as the ProCaribe Project, Caribbean SIDS are moving the needle forward for the advancement of a common vision for ocean governance in our region.

The concept of the Blue Economy is operationalized through the mechanism of ocean governance, and as such the COBE is well placed to support these initiatives and the collective need and vision of our island economies. Further, the launch of the COBE presents an excellent opportunity for us to leverage partnerships to develop local capacity that will allow us to generate the science to support policy in the ocean sphere.

As SIDS, one of the major factors limiting our development is human capacity. The training and research that will be produced through COBE will be crucial not just for informing our work in the region but will also strengthen our international negotiation skills.

In my capacity as Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda to the International Seabed Authority (ISA) I would thank them for recognising the importance and potential of the COBE. Last week the Secretary General of the ISA, His Excellency Mr. Michael Lodge signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) with Professor Robinson whereby the ISA will fund a series of workshops in partnership with COBE starting later this year to build capacity in the field of deep-sea research for Caribbean scientists.

Further, the ISA Council is currently in the process of negotiating a mining code for minerals in the deep seabed area. This is one of the most consequential international negotiations currently

ongoing as the decision could open a previously untouched area. In order to make informed decisions, we must have the necessary expertise to carry out and evaluate the complex deep-sea data.

In closing, let me extend a heartfelt thanks to those who have contributed to the development of the COBE and worked assiduously to make today a reality. We have a unique opportunity to build a Caribbean institution, from the ground up that represents our people, using the lessons learned in the past to set the foundation for a just and equitable future.

The Ocean Governance Committee looks forward to working closely with Dr. Belle and the COBE as we pursue areas of mutual interest.

Thank you.