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NEWS RELEASE

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Experts reject proposed site for Chinese Logistics Hub

"The entire Portland Bight Protected Area (including the Goat Islands) is totally unsuitable for the proposed Chinese logistics hub. If Jamaica needs this project, Jamaica needs to find a different site." This was the consensus reached by a group of experts who met on Thursday August 29th, 2013.

"Placing this development in the PBPA could destroy fisheries from Old Harbour Bay and beyond," said Professor Dale Webber of the University of the West Indies & Chairman of the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica. "The mangroves and sea grass beds of Portland Bight produce fish, conch and lobster eggs and larvae that are carried by currents all along the south coast. Without a source of eggs and larvae the fish, conch and lobster could die out," agreed Mrs. Marcia Ford of the Centre for Marine Sciences.

"The livelihoods of thousands of people will be lost. Residents will no longer be able to supplement their diets by fishing. Those people will not benefit from the proposed hub and they know it," said Dr. Ann Sutton, ecological consultant for the Caribbean Coastal Area Management Foundation (C-CAM). "The Portland Bight Fisheries Management Council does not support the proposal."

Not only would the project destroy livelihoods in the PBPA, it would increase vulnerability to natural disasters. Portland Bight is already the most disaster-prone area of Jamaica. Floods, storm surge and hurricane damage have caused massive and widespread damage to property, infrastructure (including ports) and livelihoods. In 2007, during Hurricane Dean, the people of Old Harbour Bay had to moor their boats to the upper parts of their houses. The problems come from a combination of storm surge from the sea and flooding from the land on a scale that could not be reverse-engineered.

C-CAM recently commissioned a risk assessment of the impacts of climate change in the PBPA was recently commissioned by from the Climate Studies Group at the University of the West Indies. They predicted that climate change would increase the vulnerability of the area to natural disasters. "Many of our neighboring countries, including Cuba, have recognized the implications of climate change and are moving settlements and infrastructure away from their coasts and restoring mangroves," said Dr. Ann Sutton, "But Jamaica is moving to destroy the best remaining mangrove areas."

Building this project in Portland Bight would require filling in thousands of acres of wetlands, using limestone mined from the hills and spoil dredged from the sea. The resulting loss of the wetlands, sea grasses, coral reefs and coastal forests would result

in a massive loss of biodiversity, possibly including extinction of several species known only from Portland Bight as well as reducing the ecological services, support for livelihoods and options for sustainable development that are provided by the area at no cost.

The Portland Bight Protected Area (PBPA) is the legally the most protected area in Jamaica. As well as the Protected Area designation, it includes three Fish Sanctuaries, four Game Reserves, two Forest Reserves and several sites declared under the Jamaica National Heritage Trust Act. The wetlands are recognized as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Last year the United Nations Education and Science Organization conditionally approved a proposal from the Government of Jamaica to create a Biosphere Reserve in Portland Bight. "These designations were not haphazard. They were based on years of consultation with the local people, experts and government agencies. The consultations were supported by scientific and socioeconomic research, and two economic valuations of the natural resources. The studies showed that protection of the natural resources would be a cost-effective way to enhance the economy," said Ann Sutton. "To overturn the protection of the PBPA would suggest that the government has no real commitment to the environment. It would undermine the entire protected area system," said Susan Otuokon, Executive Director of the Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust.

"So far the Government has not provided the nation with a clear description of this project, or explained in detail how it will benefit Jamaica and Jamaicans," said Diana McCaulay, CEO of Jamaica Environment Trust (JET), "They have not justified why the Chinese have asked for so much land, or explained the criteria that were used to identify Portland Bight as the best candidate site." The group called for full disclosure of the details of the project by the Government of Jamaica, and noted that similar calls had been made by Chris Zacca of the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica, Jamaicans United for Sustainable Development and other interest groups. They asked the Government to provide a list of the criteria for site selection, and indicated that the criteria should be based on the best available science. They stressed that stakeholders must be invited to participate at all stages of the process of site selection.

"We are calling on the government to carry out a thorough, scientific and transparent assessment of all the options for sites before making a decision," said Robert Stephens, (Jamaica Protected Areas Trust), "We believe that there are other more suitable sites for this development. Portland Bight cannot be one of the options - it is the worst possible location and will have much more negative than positive implications for the people of Jamaica."

Signed:

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