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'END THE SECRECY RE THE GOAT ISLANDS PORT DEVELOPMENT,' SAYS JET

The Jamaica Environment Trust (JET) notes the Government of Jamaica has finally admitted to “deferring” the application for UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status for the Portland Bight Protected Area, after a protracted application process. JET’s CEO Diana McCaulay attended a meeting at UNESCO in early December 2013, where it was stated that the final application, including the question of zoning, had been submitted by the GOJ to UNESCO in November 2013. Only a few weeks later, it was unofficially revealed at that meeting that the application had been “deferred” by the GOJ. Attempts to get official confirmation of this were unsuccessful at the time.

“The lack of transparency that has attended this important matter from the outset is nothing short of disgraceful,” said Ms McCaulay. “How can the GOJ support a process to get a Biosphere Reserve designation for Portland Bight and then suddenly end the application process without any notice or discussion with stakeholders?”

JET emphasizes that a Biosphere Reserve is NOT a wilderness designation. In fact, UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere programme is based on ensuring a sustainable balance between the goals of conserving biological diversity, promoting economic development, and maintaining associated cultural values. Each Biosphere Reserve is intended to fulfill three basic functions:

- conservation – to contribute to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation;
- development – to foster economic and human development which is socio- culturally and ecologically sustainable;
- logistics - to provide support for research, monitoring, education and information exchange related to local, national and global issues of conservation and development.

“For the GOJ to pull out of this programme clearly demonstrates their lack of commitment to sustainable development, whatever they might say, ” continued Ms McCaulay.

JET calls on the GOJ to release all known details about the port development in the Portland Bight Protected Area immediately so that adequate public consultation can commence.

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