



**Sir Frank Worrell Memorial Lecture 2021**  
**“Climate Change and Sport”**  
**By Dr. the Right Honourable Keith Mitchell**  
**Prime Minister of Grenada**  
**June 28, 2021**

Good evening to one and all. I am humbled by the opportunity to be part of this memorial activity once more.

Sir Frank Worrell’s enduring legacy is one of astute leadership, championing regionalism, the courage to face and address daunting challenges, and recognising the socio-cultural importance of the sport of cricket in the Caribbean.

It is often stated that as a region, sport is central to our sense of self and significance on the world stage. In fact, it is through sport that we are most identified collectively as a region. Nothing has united us and brought us prominence like sport, and West Indies cricket has been at the tip of the arrow pushing us to global prominence. This prominence affords us an audience, a platform to advocate for issues that affect us as a people.

In much the same way that sport was instrumental in raising the alarm about discrimination, racism, apartheid, human rights violations, and environmental degradation, so too, sport can be used to sound a clarion call for the need to address the climate crisis that is threatening our existence.

To use cricket as one of the vehicles to advance our work towards the fight against the impact of climate change requires a concerted effort to address the current crisis in West Indies Cricket that affects its prominence.

The leadership exemplified by Sir Frank must now be emulated with respect to West Indies Cricket and climate change. Historically, the West Indies cricket team has demonstrated an uncanny ability to triumph against the odds. Being the underdogs sometimes, they have consistently punched above their weight. Here now, is an opportunity for us, as underdogs in this war on climate change, to bring the same fight to this particular crisis that threatens our very existence. Our lives depend on it, as well as the future of our children and grandchildren.

The impact of climate change such as extreme weather events, flooding, sea-level rise, drought, and bushfires, affects both lives and livelihoods.

Sports, in particular, our lovely cricket, are not spared the impact of such events. Literature on the subject has demonstrated that excessive heat has significant impacts on the health and performance of players and spectators alike, as it can lead to heat exhaustion and impact injuries caused by playing on harder surfaces.

Periods of drought significantly affect water availability and use in sports, thereby necessitating water efficiency initiatives that build climate resilience.

The literature also illustrates that the increased frequency and severity of storms and hurricanes significantly affects sporting infrastructure. In fact, a game-changer report published last year by the Climate Coalition noted that, “of all the major pitch sports, cricket will be the hardest hit by climate change.”

In providing feedback on the report, Australia’s Shane Warne, highlighted a critical point when he said, “The game has to have a plan, a strategy for how we adapt.”

I therefore want to affirm, how critical it is for climate adaptation measures to be incorporated into the design of new sports venues or the refurbishment of existing structures.

The imperative to insulate sports from the impacts of climate change by way of investing in resilient infrastructure, is now the order of the day, and we cannot neglect our responsibility to make this happen. Decisive action is needed and we must act now.

Renewable energy technologies are critical for the future carbon zero world in sports. It is estimated that globally, carbon emissions from sports are equal to that of a medium-sized country.

Cricket accounts for a fair amount of this through emissions from travel, construction and operation of playing facilities and emissions from its support networks. Making a carbon-zero world the common sense priority of the sports world, would make a huge contribution towards achieving the overall objective.

There are some notable efforts in this regard, including that of the Lords Cricket Facility, usually referred to as the home of cricket, which is now 100% powered from renewable energy sources. However, there’s need for much more to be done. One would therefore expect that all sporting facilities in the Caribbean and beyond, will be “greener” and built to the necessary climate-resilient standard.

Our region needs to take up the challenge to participate in the global fight against climate change from a holistic standpoint.

It’s not just about cricket, the region’s athletes and footballers continue to perform well on the international stage, bringing prominence to their respective countries. Here in Grenada, we had our own moment in the spotlight when Kirani James won Olympic gold.

As our high performing sports men and women continue to shine a light on the Caribbean, we can use the platform created by their success, to similarly highlight our vulnerabilities and underscore the need for urgent action.

The governing bodies for the various sporting disciplines should seriously consider signing on to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Sports for Climate Action Initiative. This Initiative is guided by five principles:

- Principle 1: Undertake systematic efforts to promote greater environmental responsibility;
- Principle 2: Reduce overall climate impact;
- Principle 3: Educate for climate action;
- Principle 4: Promote sustainable and responsible consumption;
- Principle 5: Advocate for climate action through communication.

Signatories to the Sports for Climate Action commit themselves to support the implementation of the principles contained in its framework, by pursuing them within their organisations, by leading the work for a specific principle, and by working collectively with other signatories.

There are now 238 signatories to this initiative. Unfortunately, the International Cricket Council nor any of cricket's national governing bodies have signed up. Cricket West Indies is not listed nor is the ICC but our Frank Worrell Trophy competitor, Australia, is listed through the Melbourne Cricket Club. This is something we need to correct.

I, therefore, call upon the WICB to take the lead in signing up to this and to advocate within the ICC for international cricket to become part of this initiative. As small island developing states, we in the Caribbean, have to take the lead at all levels in the fight against climate change, as we are disproportionately affected by its impact.

While we note that at the recently concluded G7 meeting, the leaders reaffirmed the goal of mobilising \$100 billion a year and committed to improving climate finance to 2025, this is but a small step forward.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, vulnerable countries ought not to depend solely on handouts; which of course are welcomed, but must take leadership in developing indigenous and smart solutions for addressing the climate problem. We ought not to wait on global consensus to act.

Sir Frank Worrell did not wait on a global consensus on discrimination to mould his team to be the best outfit in the cricketing business. He demonstrated sound leadership on the field of play and so too, our countries need to show leadership in the field of climate change.

As I stated in the "Hit for Six Report", as a region every ball bowled at us is currently a bouncer. We're ducking so much we're struggling to build an innings that will ensure a

safe, secure and sustainable future for our people. We are all impacted by climate change; there's not a country in the world that can afford to ignore the clear warnings from climate scientists. There is not a sport that can turn a blind eye to the devastating impacts of climate change. Cricket cannot afford to ignore the incontestable climate science.

My friends, history has clearly demonstrated that sports can contribute meaningfully, to addressing the climate change problem and there is actually potential for cricket, or sports in general, to lead in the response to climate change.

The keen interest of billions of fans around the world, and the media coverage generated in response, provide an ideal platform for cricket to play an exemplary role in meeting the challenge of climate change adaptation and inspiring and engaging large audiences to do the same.

If we are to mimic Sir Frank's legacy, we should examine leadership, regional and indeed, global cooperation, adaptation and mitigation as responses to the challenge, and the socio-cultural efficacy of the messaging.

Sir Frank's trademarked contribution was his insistence on a lack of insularity and we are seeing it at the level of SIDS and regional collaboration, with respect to international climate finance.

Like Sir Frank, we are aware of the platform presented by sport to lift Caribbean dignity, our sense of accomplishment and our ability to face any challenge.

When we think of raising alarms and getting the word out, sports journalism springs to mind. There were times when the average citizen turned to the sports pages in the newspaper first. Today, we are more likely to find a test match between England and New Zealand on our TV networks than one between the West Indies and South Africa.

The Australians are getting ready to tour the Caribbean in July and there's something Pat Cummins said a while ago which resonated with me. He said, "I'm used to competing in a battle between bat and ball. The battle for climate change is, of course, a lot more important than just a game of cricket ... we've seen athletes forced out of their events due to extreme heat and fire, and community cricket clubs forced to end their seasons early."

That's the reality sisters and brothers, but climate change is not just affecting the playing field, it is causing spectators to question whether to show up; it, therefore, affects sportspersons in their preparation and performance.

From a sponsorship point of view, there are many corporations, wishing to maintain their eco-friendly and environmentally responsible ethos, that are willing to nudge sporting organisations to reduce their carbon footprint.

Cricket, the sport dearest to West Indians hearts, has always had a connection to weather. We schedule matches and indeed the season according to our traditional climate norms. Ever conscious of the weather impact, we jokingly say, if you want rain just stick three stumps to start a game of cricket.

We know how to make captaincy decisions based on tidal sea levels, and how humidity and wind speed can affect swing bowling.

I am pleased to see West Indies cricketers and the WICB appearing in hurricane preparedness messages in the new Disaster Fighters Campaign, launched by the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). I was also happy to listen to the disaster prevention songs featuring some of our Caribbean artistes including Dwayne Bravo, or DJ Bravo as he is known. Well done and I look forward to seeing more efforts like this.

The need for action is a collective one, no one bears sole responsibility. Collectively, we can mainstream climate action into sports at all levels and engage all stakeholders; we can host a round table on climate change in sport where we share information and create a joint plan of action; the media can help to create better informed citizens and there should be a thorough study on climate change and sport, highlighting the issues and interventions needed as well as an engagement strategy.

This call to action speaks to organised efforts at institutional levels but what can we do as individuals – what can be your own contribution to this fight against climate change, this fight for survival? Empower yourselves, get better informed on climate change issues; advocate for urban greening and use mass transportation where possible; make the switch to alternative energy and demand more climate-friendly products from businesses.

My friends, the time for action is now. We have to make climate change one of the most important agenda items for our region. We must do better in explaining to our people how this can dramatically impact their lives. And we must lead on the global stage. Having just assumed the role of Chairman of the OECS, I pledge to make this one of my most urgent priorities. I recently supported a call by my colleague Prime Minister, Dr. Ralph Gonsalves for a deepening of our regional integration movement and a more unified regional approach. Sir Frank would have supported our call and would have told us that we need to act with far more urgency in our thrust to accelerate integration. We as a region have perhaps done the least to contribute to this global climate emergency. However, the consequences of climate change may affect us the most.

Therefore, climate change because of its impact on us all, could be the issue and focal point that leads to a more unified regional approach to important issues facing our region. Like West Indies cricket which brought us together as one mighty nation, we must now form a powerful regional alliance to address climate change issues on the global stage. Let us use the issue of climate change, not to divide but to unite us.

I thank you.