

August 22, 2025

**PRESS RELEASE**

On Tuesday 19 August, 2025, His Excellency Dr. Akima Umezawa, Ambassador of Japan participated in the Handover Ceremony for the “Project for Improving National Sargassum Management Capabilities in the Caribbean” at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. Ambassador Umezawa officially handed over the keys to two tractors procured under the project, which is funded by a US\$ 12.3 million grant from the Government of Japan and implemented by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Among the many participants in the ceremony were the Honourable Khadijah Ameen, Minister of Rural Development and Local Government; Mr. Peter Mitchell, Permanent Secretary (Ag.), Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government; Mr. Ugo Blanco, Resident Representative, UNDP; and Dr. Rahanna Juman, Chair of the National Project Steering Committee and the National Sargassum Task Force.

In his remarks, Ambassador Umezawa underscored his personal interest in the project, having witnessed the thick mats of sargassum himself and given his academic background in marine biology. Ambassador Umezawa then took the opportunity to refer to ongoing research and entrepreneurial efforts in Japan for the effective use and treatment of sargassum, and expressed his hope that sargassum management in the Caribbean would lead to its further use as a resource in the region.

The Honourable Minister Ameen conveyed her appreciation to the Government of Japan and emphasized the project as proof of the effectiveness of international partnerships. She noted the project's alignment with several national and international disaster frameworks, and encouraged further entrepreneurial endeavours utilizing sargassum. Moreover, Minister Ameen urged the effective and efficient use of the equipment to ensure the project's sustainability.

Mr. Blanco likewise thanked the Government of Japan for its strategic intervention in the management of sargassum in five Caribbean countries. He also underscored the significant negative impact of sargassum, and proposed the value in exploring future partnerships to transform sargassum from a problem to an opportunity.

This project demonstrates the Government of Japan's commitment to offer support in areas such as disaster prevention, environment, energy, waste management and fisheries in order to overcome the vulnerabilities inherent to small island countries, as well as to promote friendly relations and mutual understanding with Caribbean countries.

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Ambassador Umezawa delivers remarks



The Honourable Khadijah Ameen delivers the keynote address



Mr. Ugo Blanco delivers remarks



Ambassador Umezawa hands the keys to the equipment to Minister Ameen