

Branson gets clean energy commitments in Caribbean

February 6 2014, by David Mcfadden

Political delegations from several small Caribbean islands who gathered this week on British tycoon Richard Branson's private isle committed Thursday to working with his renewable energy nonprofit and move at a faster pace to cut their dependence on fossil fuels.

Branson, the billionaire entrepreneur who is CEO and founder of the Virgin Group of companies, which includes an airline and media properties, said it's time for Caribbean governments "to cut through all the red tape" and embrace their deep resources in [renewable energy](#) such as solar and wind. He made the comments on the last day of a three-day meeting of political and business leaders on his roughly 170-acre Moskito Island in the British Virgin Islands archipelago.

The "10 Island Challenge" of the Carbon War Room, the nonprofit Branson co-founded, is encouraging islands to transition to [clean energy](#) and get as carbon-neutral as possible. Small Caribbean nations including St. Lucia, Dominica, and St. Kitts and Nevis have committed to working with the group to focus on embracing [clean energy technologies](#). The nonprofit has already been working with Aruba.

"We're trying to remove the roadblocks to just getting on and doing it," Branson told The Associated Press on Moskito, where roughly 100 politicians, public officials and businessmen discussed clean energy technologies and drank shots of coconut water beneath a tent set up on a tennis court.

The Carbon War Room says it will provide countries with assistance in attracting top engineering companies and financiers. It will also help with a request for proposals for future projects such as improving [energy efficiency](#) in hospitals.

Jose Maria Figueres, a former Costa Rican president who is now the president of the Carbon War Room, said a major objective is to lower the cost of energy in a region which has one of the world's highest power costs. He said import-dependent islands pay high rates of 35 to 55 cents per kilowatt hour, "crippling their economies, rendering them uncompetitive, and not allowing for job creation to take place."

"You turn that around by moving to renewables because what we have is wind and sun," Figueres said.

Punishing electricity costs that are as much as five times more expensive than prices on the U.S. mainland and a lack of energy security have long been major concerns in the scattered islands of the Caribbean. The sun-splashed, wind-swept region derives nearly all of its electricity from plants that burn imported oil and diesel.

The prime ministers of St. Lucia, St. Kitts & Nevis and Dominica were among the attendees hosted by Branson.

Branson urged the various island delegations to put any political squabbles aside and focus on making serious headway with advancing clean energy in the region.

"Just move on and get it done so that two years from now people can start seeing the benefits in their energy bills," he said.

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