

## Jamaica could earn billions from limestone industry - researcher

A leading Jamaican researcher believes that the country could earn up to seven billion US dollars annually by increasing the production of limestone and its value added products.

Executive Chairman of Conrad Douglas and Associates, Dr. Conrad Douglas, told a recent stakeholder that the industry offers vast opportunities for investors in agriculture, food processing, and manufacturing. "There are great opportunities...what we found were really large. We are talking about total cumulative value for the markets of some US\$7 billion," he said, citing the production of paper, polishes, paints, rubber, glass, cosmetics, plastics and adhesives. Douglas said Jamaica was blessed with rich limestone resources and is considered as the limestone capital of the world. Limestone resources here are estimated at 150 billion tonnes of which 50 billion tonnes is recoverable. The main export markets for limestone are Canada, United States, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and South America.

"Jamaican limestone is occurring naturally, we have been producing it, and we have been exporting it, and it has found acceptance in the international markets. We have pharmaceutical limestone, we have chemical limestone, and we also have metallurgical limestone (use primarily in the bauxite industry). Limestone has the most diverse end-use structure of all material known by mankind. That, in itself, presents a wide range of opportunities," Douglas said. But he noted that there was need to focus on the production of high value-added products to drive the industry for the future. "We believe that there is opportunity, as found from the study, to ramp-up production to a greater level," he said, adding that currently, Jamaica imports limestone products that can be manufactured locally, and some 10 plants across the island can be "ramped-up easily" for the production of these value-added items. However he said that for the development of the sector, a number of legislation relating to planning and development orders need to be amended and that "great reliance" would have to be placed on scientists in the development of the industry. "It means that we have to apply best sciences, and the best technology, and the best environment management practices to embark on a path of sustainable development and the use of creative conservation technologies, which now exist for the rehabilitation of those areas, which we might extract this resource from," Douglas's team is to conduct two other studies on the limestone industry, one looking at the required investment for the sector, while the other will explore technical and environmental plans for the companies involved in the industry. Principal Director in the Ministry of Science, Technology, Energy and Mining, Dr. Oral Rainford, said Jamaica has the possibility of becoming the centre of the limestone business in this part of the world. "We are speaking of the aggregate, we are speaking of the value-added, and all the business associated with limestone," he said, adding that the government wanted to integrate the sector into the wider economy. "We are going to see that a large number of products can be generated from these resources, a large number of jobs can be created, and the wealth that ought to flow from these resources will begin to appear," he added. Junior Minister in the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce, Sharon Ffolkes-Abraham, urged investors and those already in the limestone business, to "grasp, with both hands, the opportunities that can be realised from developing the value-added products that can be derived from limestone, for our economic benefit."