

**ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
COOPERATION AND COMMUNITIES IN THE OPENING SESSION OF THE REGIONAL  
MEETING OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES**

(Unofficial translation. Original: Portuguese)

Excellencies,

Honourable Chairman of AOSIS

Honourable Representatives of Small Island Developing States,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very pleased to welcome you to our capital and our islands.

Cape Verde is proud of hosting this important meeting of East Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and of South China Seas SIDS in the process of evaluation of the progress achieved in the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action that will culminate next year with the Mauritius International Meeting.

Together with SIDS delegations, we greet the presence and participation of important development partners, UN system's specialized agencies, as well as distinguished international institutions that have been contributing not only to keep international community's attention upon problems that are specific to our states, but also have been taking active part, side by side with Island Countries, in the search for practical solutions to these same problems.

We extend our acknowledgement to all for your honourable presence and we wish that at the end of this meeting you will be pleased with the results accomplished.

We do hope that, beyond the important discussions we are about to launch, the participants will have the opportunity to make contacts and evaluate all possibilities of bilateral cooperation between the different countries represented in this forum.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The debate that will be held in this city of Praia during the next five days cover a significant range of subjects of fundamental importance for the future of all States represented in this meeting. However, they transcend our borders.

Indeed, island states represent a relevant part of Humankind patrimony that must be safeguarded. Today, the need to launch an urgent and joint action at global level to protect and preserve this patrimony is internationally agreed upon.

But island states also represent the habitat of millions of human beings whose existence is permanently challenged by climatic, economic and environmental factors, which, in some cases, may lead to the extreme consequence of its extinction by submersion.

It was against this background of increasing awareness of these threats by international public opinion, stirred up by an attentive and coordinated action of Small Island States, that the "special case" of SIDS was recognised and included in Agenda 21 of Rio Summit.

In 1994, the Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados, adopted the Programme of Action, which represents a remarkable document in terms of scope and thoroughness of its guidelines and perspectives leading to an innovative cooperation to face the challenges and special constraints affecting the Small Island States.

The assessment made in 1999 and the reaffirmation through the Millennium Declaration, of the international community's interest to pursue the efforts aiming at supporting SIDS to promote sustainable development, ensured that during the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development the island issues deserved a special focus, as witnessed by the chapter devoted to this matter in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

Among other relevant decisions, the document recommended the convening of an international meeting to evaluate all implementation aspects of Barbados Programme of Action. This recommendation issued from Johannesburg was welcomed by UN General Assembly that, through its resolution 57/262, decided to convene the meeting that will be held in Mauritius of which our gathering constitutes an important preparatory stage.

The Small Islands Developing States acknowledge that they have the primary responsibility for their own development. That it is why they have committed themselves to promote sustainable development and to broadly accomplish the Barbados Programme of Action in an effective manner.

Through their association AOSIS – whose President honours us with his distinguished presence – the SIDS have played a key and productive role in the search of the means to assure the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action at world level. Their commitment has been critical for the consolidation of the achievements made by the Programme, particularly during the negotiations that led to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

However, numerous constraints lay in the way: increasing vulnerability and the challenges arising from poverty, climate changes, continued environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS, deepening of digital divide, economic and commercial marginalization require that SIDS make redoubled efforts with a view to achieving sustained development. International support is therefore vital to broaden and strengthen their capacity to face the ongoing challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The participants will have the opportunity to compare their respective countries experiences, in the framework of the Barbados Programme of Action. From these assessments and from the evaluation of achievements and failures will certainly arise recommendations and contributions of great value to the Mauritius Meeting, scheduled for next year.

Similarly to the small islands of other regions, our countries face formidable challenges. Out of these challenges, some stand out: isolation and dispersion, environmental degradation, desertification, sea-level rise, increasing difficulties of access to world markets in the growing globalisation. And to face all this, we are very short of natural, human and institutional resources.

Other factors however, contribute to particularly aggravate the situation of the countries in our region, making it the most vulnerable among the three SIDS regional groups.

Indeed, almost half of these countries are also included in the group of Least Developed Countries (*LDCs*), and that mirrors directly their capacity of implementing the Barbados Programme of Action, leading to an increased dependence vis-à-vis foreign aid.

Besides, their distribution throughout three continents, two oceans and two seas make the coordination efforts at institutional level extremely complex and demanding, in the framework of a concerted action aiming at implementing Barbados Programme of Action.

The deep disparity existing at development level among countries in the region also hampers an integrated approach of sustainable development.

It is yet in our region where exists the least linguistic homogeneity, which translates into reduced communication and exchange of experiences among its members.

The additional constraints of AIMS group are bound to be reflected in the level of implementation of Barbados Programme of Action and on its ownership by the civil society of our respective countries. Its impact is directly noticeable at coordination level among the region's countries, with decreased inter-island contacts and opportunities.

The above referred concerns have deserved the attention of our group of countries. Two important ministerial meetings held in 1998, in Mahé - Seychelles, and in Valetta - Malta, focussed on our region's specific aspects, identified several of the mentioned constraints and stressed the need for coordinated approaches among our countries, aiming at improved utilisation of human resources, promotion of economies of scale and a joint action to respond to common challenges. In both meetings the specific characteristics of our region were stressed and the participant States underlined the need to develop specific coordination methods and mechanisms with a view to implementing the Barbados Programme of Action.

More recently, with the support of, among others, UNEP, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Indian Ocean Commission – whose presence in this meeting express their interest to the region – technical consultations were held in London, which resulted in recommendations aiming at establishing a coordination mechanism among the region's countries.

Thus, the awareness concerning the need for a coordinated action within our group is clear and we are pleased that the issue has been included in this meeting's agenda.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your agenda includes addressing the issue of vulnerability- an essential aspect of the insular condition. It is a subject of utmost importance to our countries as it is broadly recognised that, as a group, SIDS are the most vulnerable among developing countries.

Thanks to the seminal research accomplished by distinguished scholars, among whom we are pleased to have here some of their most outstanding representatives, the issue of vulnerability has gained relevance in the overall assessment of the situation of small island states.

The concept of vulnerability, that has deserved dedicated attention by Professors Albert Binger and Lino Briguglio, both participating in this meeting, helps us to understand how a developing island state globally reacts to economic, environmental and social challenges.

The development of tools to measure economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities provides us with a foundation to understand the special case of SIDS, as well as the mechanism that will support our group in the search of a paradigm of sustainable development, more consistent with the legitimate expectations of our populations.

This subject has also deserved the attention of UNCTAD, particularly in what concerns those countries which are simultaneously insular and less developed. UNCTAD has produced vulnerability profiles of some of them and drew the attention to the so-called "island paradox".

The UN General Assembly, through its Resolution 57/262, of February 28, 2003 on the implementation of Barbados Programme of Action, recognised the importance of the vulnerability index for the work of the Committee of Development Policies as regards the criteria for the identification, including designation and graduation of the least developed countries.

Bearing in mind the specific peculiarities of our region's countries and the high percentage of least developed countries in our group, discussions on this subject are undoubtedly opportune.

Excellencies

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this meeting our countries have the opportunity to critically evaluate the steps made towards sustainable development, to guarantee that the specific concerns of our region be reflected in the results of the final negotiations in Mauritius and from the global assessment of the results achieved

since Barbados, to contribute as to guiding conclusions be extracted for the future. We hope that within one year, we will be able to agree upon with the international community a pragmatic and satisfactory framework that fosters our countries development at a speedier and more harmonious rhythm.

Against this background we do hope that the International Meeting of Mauritius will be a clear success of international cooperation and become a milestone in the implementation of Barbados Programme of Action, inspiring new initiatives that respond, in an effective manner, to the needs of the Small Island Developing States.

Therefore, I have the honour to declare opened the Preparatory Meeting of SIDS/AIMS on the Implementation of Barbados Programme of Action.

Thank you.