



PACIFIC SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES
United Nations Member States

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Statement by

H.E. President Marcus Stephen, M.P.
of the Republic of Nauru

on behalf of the

Pacific Small Island Developing States (Pacific SIDS)

at the

Opening Plenary of the High-level Review Meeting on the
implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the implementation of
the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the
Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small
Island Developing States

Friday, 24 September 2010
New York

Mr. President
Mr. Secretary-General
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States represented at the United Nations namely; Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my own country Nauru.

The Pacific SIDS align themselves with the statements to be delivered by the Honourable Tillman Thomas, Prime Minister of Grenada on behalf of AOSIS, and the Honourable Edward Natapei, Prime Minister of Vanuatu on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum.

Mr. President,

It is clear that there have been meaningful achievements in SIDS and I commend those countries that have made progress towards sustainable development. I also want to thank our development partners working in the Pacific for their dedicated support.

Regrettably, progress towards sustainable development has been considerably below expectations overall. In the absence of concrete targets in the Mauritius Strategy, the Millennium Development Goals offer useful insight. While some countries are on track to meet some of their MDGs, most Pacific SIDS are severely lagging behind other groupings. Most alarming, the vast majority of Pacific SIDS are not on track to reduce basic-needs poverty. In some countries, the level of poverty incidence may have actually increased.

Our vision from Barbados has not been realized.

I say this, not to minimize the considerable work done by all members of our global community. I say this, because I want to be very clear about the gravity of the situation facing SIDS.

Mr. President,

The major obstacle to progress is the lack of understanding on the part of the international community regarding the many vulnerabilities that are unique and particular to SIDS. Our special combination of geographical, economic and environmental characteristics makes many of our development challenges especially complex and severe. This includes isolation from major markets, small populations sizes and economies, vulnerability to natural disasters, fragile freshwater supplies, narrow resource bases, costly infrastructure, and extreme vulnerability to climate change and sea level rise. Today, SIDS are seeking concrete action and I call on the international community to create a formal SIDS category with structural support mechanisms in the areas of trade and finance. These mechanisms should specifically address the vulnerabilities of SIDS. We ask the Secretary-General to lead this process so that it receives the attention it deserves.

Adequate financial support is necessary to enable the sustainable development of our islands. We face major obstacles in accessing international finance owing to eligibility criteria that do not always accommodate small scale projects. In addition, the application and monitoring requirements are often beyond our limited capacity.

Moreover, official development assistance remains short of the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income – a goal set 40 years ago by this august body. The global economic crisis should not deter developed countries from providing the assistance necessary to alleviate poverty and meet their commitments. A small amount saved today will end up costing all of us much more tomorrow. Some of us are already paying a high price in terms of human suffering. In the words of the Secretary-General and I quote “We should not balance budgets on the backs of the poor”, unquote.

This review has also highlighted serious shortcomings in UN institutional assistance to SIDS. Earlier this year, the Committee for Development Policy analyzed UN support for SIDS and concluded that it had insufficient information regarding the work of several organs and bodies of the UN and the World Bank. For those agencies that have been working on SIDS issues, it was not clear as to what extent their work was guided by the Barbados Programme of Action or the Mauritius Strategy. It is essential that we critically and comprehensively evaluate UN support for SIDS, which should include a review of the mandates of the specialized agencies. The Pacific SIDS considers this is an essential element of the political declaration that we will adopt tomorrow.

Mr. President,

The Pacific SIDS are highly dependent on marine resources for food security and economic growth, yet these resources are being depleted by actions beyond our control. While the Pacific has shown leadership in marine biodiversity conservation through the creation of protected areas, our efforts need to be complimented by the elimination of global over fishing and destructive fishing practices.

We also require foreign investment in our small fishing industries so that we can receive a more equitable share of the economic benefit from our valuable fish stocks. This proposal would assist in our economic self sufficiency.

Mr. President,

We cannot talk meaningfully about sustainable development without also addressing climate change. There is a concerted effort in some quarters to lower expectations, not only for COP16 in Cancun, but for the UNFCCC process in general. This is deeply alarming, and jeopardizes the sustainable development prospects, and in many cases, the very survival of Pacific SIDS. I ask all nations, developed and developing alike, to arrive in Cancun ready to make progress on a fair solution that will ensure the survival of our islands. As leaders, we have a responsibility to protect the security and well being of our people. We cannot fail them on this critical issue.

We must also ensure that all UN organs are actively responding to the climate crisis, including the Security Council. Earlier this year, the Pacific SIDS wrote to members of the Security Council asking them put to climate change on their agenda in accordance with the resolution this body adopted last year. As the primary organ of the United Nations entrusted with preserving international peace and security, the Security Council must have a role in responding to the climate change crisis.

In conclusion, I would like to extend a warm invitation to His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon to visit the Pacific and see first hand the realities of what life is really like in our islands; to see first hand why we urgently need a formal SIDS category and an ambitious agreement on climate change that provides our islands a realistic prospect of survival.

I thank you.