



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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Opening Remarks

By

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and co-chair

of

**Round table 1: “Reducing vulnerabilities and strengthening resilience of
small island developing states”**

at the

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

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New York

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The front page of Monday's *New York Times* greeted me with a distressing article on coral bleaching. Due to rising sea temperatures, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Australia's Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) are predicting a disastrous worldwide outbreak of coral bleaching in the Caribbean and Pacific islands this year. This predicted widespread bleaching would have disastrous effects on the biodiversity and tourism in my country, not to mention the livelihoods of the fisherfolk who earn a living and feed their families through their reliance on the sea.

In many ways, the article and the prospect of large swaths of bleached and dying coral are emblematic of the vulnerabilities facing Small Island Developing States (SIDS). We are on the frontlines of global problems that are not of our making, and whose impact is so disproportionate as to threaten our way of life, and indeed, our very existence.

Climate change, unfair trading regimes, transnational crime, the collapse of the global economy and the recent crises in food and fuel prices each have to individual potential to stunt or even reverse our fragile developmental progress. Together, they form a developmental tsunami with the potential to both literally and figuratively wipe our island states off the map. None of these phenomena originated within our islands, and no amount of local policy prescriptions can fully insulate us from their effects.

And this is the essence of our vulnerability: there is no other regional grouping or set of states whose sustainable development and whose existence depends so heavily on the conduct of others. To use the language of the outcome document that will arise from this weekend's High Level review conference, the "unique and particular vulnerabilities of small island developing States" cannot be questioned.

We have been endangered by the profligate consumption of resources by other countries; we have been disappointed by the broken promises of increased development assistance and debt relief; we have despaired at the global financial collapse and its knock on effects on our economies; we have thus far been disillusioned by the minimal progress in negotiations to reverse climate change and trade imbalances; and we remain anxious about the homogenised global culture that threatens to overwhelm our customs and unique civilisations.

John Donne, a 17th Century poet, is probably best known for his "Meditation XVII" which begins with the famous words "*No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. . .*" In the 17th Century, Donne could proclaim that no man is an island. Today, the forces of globalization dictate acceptance of the fact that no island is an island. We are no longer insulated – for better or worse – from the consequences of others' actions.

However, because of our openness, small size and vulnerability, the fortunes of SIDS are reflective of, and responsive to, the health of our global architecture in a way that no other set of States can claim to be. We are the barometer – the canary in the mineshaft – of the global economy and the planet's health. Our development and survival is not simply a discrete regional issue, it is inextricably intertwined and mutually dependent upon global development and international responsibility. As goes the world, so go SIDS. And vice-versa.

With that in mind, I crave your indulgence in allowing me to conclude these opening remarks by revisiting the words of Donne's "Meditation XVII," in the context of the relationship between SIDS and our larger friends and partners:

*No man is an island entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less,
as well as if a promontory were,
as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were;
any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
it tolls for thee.*

As we begin this Mauritius Strategy review and contemplate the outcome of the just-concluded Summit on the Millennium Development Goals; and as we examine the contours of development cooperation in a still-evolving geopolitical and economic order, the unique needs and vulnerabilities of the SIDS must occupy a special place in the hearts, minds and policies of our friends and partners.

I look forward to listening to all of your contributions to this important discussion.