

COMMISSION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

United Nations, New York, May 8th and 10th 2010

“Five-Year Review of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Barbados Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States: The Pacific High-level Dialogue”

Honorable, Sela Molisa, (Minister of Finance and Economic Management, Republic of Vanuatu and Chairman, Pacific SIDS)

Honorable Chair,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor and privilege to present the report of the Pacific SIDS on the Mid-Term Review of the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation of the Barbados Program of Action. You have with you the Outcome Document of the Pacific High-level Dialogue on the Mid-Term Review, which now forms part of the Pacific Regional Report. The Pacific Regional Report documents the activities undertaken by the Pacific in pursuance of the goals and objectives of the MSI.

In presenting the Pacific report, I wish to convey three messages. First, despite the progress that has been made through the many activities undertaken in the Pacific, we have a long way to go in achieving the MSI goals and objectives. Secondly, without a doubt, the Global Economic Crisis and the increasing threat from Climate Change emphasizes the fact that we in the Pacific simply can not deal with these development challenges on our own: these are challenges of global origins and global proportions requiring global, and regional, actions. Thirdly, effective responses to new and remaining challenges in the implementation of the MSI require not only a strong commitment on the part of our region, but also a much stronger commitment from the international community and the United Nations system.

Chair, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We in the Pacific live in a region which covers a third of the earth's surface. By way of illustrating the enormity of our oceanic size, Kiribati, our largest nation, is also a nation that lives in today and tomorrow at the same time. It is a nation so big that the whole of the Caribbean region could fit within it. Kiribati's citizens actually require the permission of a foreign government to fly over to some of their eastern islands.

We are a region of small nations surrounded by ocean with long and watery highways that can be isolating and limiting; and which sometimes transmit terrible tragedies as we have witnessed in the devastating tsunamis and wave action of last year.

At the same time, our warm waters, colorful reefs and our enormous seabed, and our islands do in fact present many opportunities, for ourselves and, I might emphasize, for the rest of humanity. Many of our nations are small in land and homogenous in cultural makeup, but as a whole our region boasts some of the greatest diversities on earth in cultures and biological resources.

We are by and large a stable and democratic region which benefits from overseas aid and income from tourists and our migrant workers. Some of us also continue to benefit from substantial but finite natural resources in mining, forestry and fisheries.

We have many and reasonably well-funded regional organizations and programs in government and non-government circles, in academia and research, in media, sports, religion etc. And, we are fortunate to have a large number of international agencies and bilateral donors operating in our region.

And yet, with all of this, poverty rates in our region continue to rise. The majority of Pacific islanders are now living at or below national poverty lines. In terms of the Millennium Development Goals, within Asia-Pacific--a region containing the largest number of poor people in the world--our Pacific sub-region is the worst performer. In fact globally, we do better only in comparison to the sub-Saharan region of Africa. None of our countries--and that includes the middle-income countries like Cook Islands and Palau--is on track to achieve all the goals by 2015; and not one of the 8 MDGs is likely to be achieved by all. In addition, our countries are some of the most vulnerable of the world – and our vulnerability is increasing. The 2009 MDG Asia-Pacific Regional Report by UNESCAP, ADB and UNDP, notes that our vulnerability has increased at the same time as our coping capacity has decreased.¹

The Global Economic Crisis-- triggered by distortions and abuses in the global financial and commodity markets—has, to put it crudely, made things much worse. It has further lowered our economic growth, worsened the economic outlook, decreased government revenues and increased poverty and misery for many.

Similarly, climate change continues to make the Pacific more and more vulnerable to sea-level rise and seawater inundation, as well as to damaging natural disasters. It is critical that in the face of the many changes and threats upon us, that we maintain the resilience of the ecosystems that enable us to continue to live on our islands.

Our marine resources, which we depend on for food security and economic growth includes the last remaining major tuna stocks, something of great interest to the rest of the world as well. The resources are being exploited with minimal returns to our region, so we seek stronger actions by

¹ “Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in an Era of Global Uncertainty” (Asia-Pacific Regional Report 2009/10, UNESCAP (www.unescap.org), ADB (www.adb.org), UNDP (www.undp.org).

the international community to ensure the sustainability of the stocks and greater economic participation in and benefit from the tuna resources accruing to the countries of our region.

Chair, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In February, the United Nations convened a High Level Dialogue among Pacific governments and other stakeholders to discuss our region's progress in the MSI, and also a conference to discuss the impact of the Global Economic Crisis.² We identified a number of national actions and regional initiatives that can help us address the global economic crisis and advance the implementation of the MSI. What is sometimes glossed over, however, is the fact many of the challenges faced by the Pacific, including the GEC, Climate Change and ocean degradation are global in nature, while much of the policy responses being prescribed for the Pacific are for national actions. This is somewhat ironic for a region that is highly vulnerable to external shocks. We have very little influence on the global financial and trade governance which caused the global shocks in the first place; or on the climate change governance structure and carbon emissions debate.

Having said that, we recognize that reforms are necessary at the national and regional level to help us improve our resilience and be more effective in tackling poverty. Of critical importance is the need to improve inclusive and sustainable planning, budgeting and the allocation and use of all resources including through better aid co-ordination. Overseas Development Assistance also needs to be made more predictable and better aligned with national priorities and internationally-agreed goals. Pacific island leaders adopted the Cairns Compact in 2009 to improve development coordination and the implementation of the Pacific Plan, MSI and other internationally-agreed goals. The Compact is an excellent example of an initiative aimed at making positive changes through improved coordination.

But the SIDSs also face enormous challenges in accessing development assistance, technical assistance, and investment and technology which have been promised or made available by the international community. The Monterrey Consensus' promise of providing financing for development remains largely unfulfilled.

Tailored forms of assistance and access are also needed for SIDS in accordance with their special case and limited capacity. Unfortunately, multilateral funding mechanisms, perhaps with the exception of the GEF, have been slow to respond to the special requirements of Pacific SIDS. We consider this to be a central impediment to the effective implementation of the MSI.

At its London Summit in 2009, the G20 endorsed a six-point plan and made significant financial pledges that target low income countries. Furthermore, US \$30 billion has been pledged under the Copenhagen Accord in fast start funding for climate change adaptation and mitigation, The

² "Five Year Review of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Brbados Programme of Action Port Vila Outcome Statement", Pacific High-level Dialogue for the MSI Mid-Term Review, 8-9 February, 2010, Port Vila; and "Vanuatu Outcomes Statement: Pacific Conference on the Human Face of the Global Economic Crisis", 10-12 February 2010, Port Vila, Vanuatu.

Pacific SIDS add their voices to those of the Asia-Pacific LDCs³ which have called on the international community to ensure that these pledges for addressing the effects of economic crises and climate change are additional and above what had already been committed through the Monterrey Consensus. We also consider it is fundamental that eligibility for funding for climate change adaptation and mitigation goes to the vulnerable countries and not be conditional on supporting the Copenhagen Accord.

We would also like to see new funds quickly and fairly disbursed to countries with the greatest needs. The voices of the SIDSs must be represented in the governance arrangements for the new funds. The Pacific would also like to see further enhancement of the focus on SIDS as climate change negotiations continue in Mexico.

Pacific SIDS need capacity building to be able to utilize the additional resources for climate change adaptation and mitigation. At the regional level, the Pacific SIDS are keen to explore, through enhanced South-South Cooperation, the facilitation of access to financial resources, technical assistance and technology available within the Asia-Pacific region and from other SIDS regions.

The Pacific SIDSs also recognize the important role of the United Nations not only in facilitating the participation of Pacific SIDS in global reviews and dialogue but also in implementing the MSI. Given that the MSI is the only global strategy for addressing the vulnerability of SIDS, the Pacific SIDS look to the United Nations system to fully embrace this global strategy as the global mandate for their activities in SIDS regions. In this way, the UN system can more effectively function as a cohesive platform to advocate, identify and attract resources to help implement the MSI goals and objectives.

The United Nations intergovernmental processes including the regional commissions could also be better utilized by UN agencies and funds for reporting on their activities in SIDS regions. It is also the Pacific SIDS view that the sub-regional processes and mechanisms such as the Pacific Plan could be better utilized by the UN to support the implementation of and reporting on the MSI.

Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, in order to ensure that the various processes involved in this review are properly coordinated, I submit this statement as the Pacific SIDS input into the drafting of the SIDS Political Declaration that is expected to come out of the MSI High-level Review in September. I will also be submitting the Pacific SIDS report to the Special Body on the Pacific to be convened on Thursday 13th May as part of the 66th UNESCAP Commission Session in the Republic of Korea. My Government is sponsoring a Pacific SIDS MSI Resolution to the UNESCAP Commission session, which hopefully will be reflected in the ESCAP report to ECOSOC. Also, in August this year, my Prime Minister, as the 2010 host of the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, will be reporting to the Forum on the progress made in this review process.

³ High-level Asia-Pacific Policy Dialogue on the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries held on 18-20 January 2010, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Finally, on behalf of my Government and the Pacific SIDS, I want to express our appreciation to our Pacific regional organizations and partners from the UN and the donor community for the tremendous work in helping us advance the implementation of the MSI thus far. We still have a long way to travel, but its time to pause and say to our partners, thank you.

I want particularly thank UNESCAP and DESA from the UN for their assistance and leadership in this process, in ensuring that the Pacific SIDS region was able to do a good job of reviewing where we're at, at this middle point of our MSI journey.

But not unlike the U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes⁴, who, in 1931, on his 90th birthday, was still exhorting us to keep working, let me end by saying: "Thank you for getting us here; but the race is only half over; and the work never is done".

⁴ In 1931 the leaders of politics, the arts, and science met to pay tribute to Oliver Wendell Holmes, the highly respected UN Supreme Court Justice, on his 90th birthday, gave a brief, extemporaneous speech in response:

"In this symposium my part is only to sit in silence. To express one's feelings as the end draws nigh is too intimate a task. But I may mention one thought that comes to me as a listener. The riders in a race do not stop short when they reach the goal. There is a time to hear the kind voices of friends and to say to oneself: The work is done. But just as one says that, the answer comes: "The race is over, but the work never is done while the power to work remains". The canter that brings you to a standstill need not be only coming to rest. It can not be, while you still live. For to live is to function. That is all there is to living. And so I end with a line from a Latin poet who uttered the message more than fifteen hundred years ago: "Death plucks my ear and says: Live—I am coming"

Speech by Oliver Wendell Holmes titled The Race is over, but the work is never done, 1931, recited in Real Leaders don't do Power-point, Christopher Witt, 2009.