



PRESS RELEASE



OFFICE OF THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES,
LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

The Mauritius United Nations Conference Opens
With a call for Increase in Official Development Assistance to
Small Island Developing Countries

Secretary-General of the International Meeting Highlights United Nations role
In Mobilizing Resources to cope with Disaster caused by the Asian Tsunami

Port Louis, Mauritius, 10 January 2005: The Secretary-General of the United Nations International Meeting on Small Island Developing States, Anwarul K. Chowdhury, opened the International Meeting today in Port Louis for the ten-year review of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the sustainable development of Small Island Developing States with a call to the international community to increase their official development assistance (ODA) to small island developing states.

Referring to the death and destruction caused by the Asian tsunami two weeks ago, he reiterated UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's call for an urgent global early warning system.

Mr. Chowdhury indicated that many small island developing states had introduced domestic reforms in macroeconomic policies to facilitate their integration into the global economy. "The smallness and remoteness of the SIDS continue to pose serious problems in providing international aid and enhancing foreign investments," he said.

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He urged the small islands to increase their efforts to hasten the pace of regional economic integration. “Increased South-South cooperation, particularly among SIDS themselves, has the potential to enhance their sustainable development efforts,” he added.

Earlier the Secretary-General met with the President of Mauritius, Sir Anerood Jugnauth and complimented him on the progress made by Mauritius towards social and economic development, primarily in the areas of tourism, clothing, textiles and information technology.

At the inaugural meeting, the Secretary-General of the Conference proposed the election of Mr. Paul Raymond Bérenger, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, as the President of the International Meeting. Mr. Bérenger was elected by acclamation.

Mr. Chowdhury also had separate meetings with the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jaya Krishna Cuttaree and the Minister of Environment Rajesh Bhagwan. Commending them for the excellent facilities provided for the United Nations Conference at the new Swami Vivekananda International Convention Centre, Mr. Chowdhury highlighted the social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities facing small island nations, and detailed the advocacy work conducted by the Office of the High Representative to mobilize international support to increase official development assistance to small island states.

At an event on the opening day, jointly organized by the World Tourism Organization and the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing Countries, on *The Impact of Tourism on the Economies of Small Island Developing States*, Secretary-General Chowdhury underscored the importance of tourism for the development of SIDS. “Tourism can stimulate other sectors like ecotourism, water management, coastal zone management and the development of parks and protected areas. Tourism has a distinct multiplier effect on the lives of its inhabitants, particularly in small island nations,” he said.

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Mr. Chowdhury advocated for an enhanced role for regional organizations as one of the key modalities to furthering the implementation of the Programme. “Regional organizations like the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM), Pacific Islands Forum and the Indian Ocean Commission are all better placed in tackling and handling regional issues,” he added.

The Mauritius Meeting is expected to adopt a proactive strategy to further implement the Barbados Programme of Action, which includes priority areas like natural disasters, climate change, wastes, marine resources, freshwater, energy, biodiversity, transport and tourism. The strategy will also address emerging problems such as market access, HIV/AIDS and new security concerns, and new opportunities like the economic potential of information technology and island culture.

In addition to the official conference, several parallel events are being held in Mauritius: a Civil Society Forum (6-9 January), a youth gathering called “Youth Visioning for Island Living” (7-12 January), and an event aimed at promoting exchanges among small islands, the “Community Vilaj” (6-14 January), which will include a dialogue and performance space as well as an “Island Market” to showcase the diversity of island products. (Information on parallel events available on www.un.org/smallislands2005 and www.un.org/ohrlls)

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