



Statement

by

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in the
Second Committee of the
59th session of the UN General Assembly

on

Agenda Item: 85: Sustainable Development:
(b) Further implementation of the Programme of
Action for the Sustainable Development of the SIDS,
(c) International Strategy for Disaster Reduction,
and
(e) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to
Combat Desertification

United Nations,
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Mr. Chairman,

The Barbados Programme of Action adopted by the international community ten years ago is important both for the sustainable development of one of the most vulnerable groups of countries, the Small Island Developing States, and for the overall environmental health of our planet. As I have emphasized during the last two sessions of the General Assembly in this Committee, my Office has been mandated for and is actively engaged in high-level advocacy and mobilization of international support in favour of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the implementation of the Barbados Programme. We are undertaking this task in partnership with the relevant parts of the United Nations and the regional organisations as well as civil society and the private sector. I would like to take this opportunity to report to you that these activities of my Office is well under way with a view to attracting international attention and focus and generating global support for the efforts of the Small Island Developing States so essential for the further implementation of the Programme.

Mr. Chairman,

The social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities of the SIDS could not have been more glaringly demonstrated than through the horrendous destruction wrought by the cyclones and hurricanes in the Caribbean and the Pacific during 2004. The whole world saw the destructive power that nature wields over these small states. Next January's Mauritius International Meeting and Kobe World Conference need to give high priority to assist these countries to build greater resilience and enhanced preparedness in facing the overwhelming frequency of natural disasters.

During last one year the SIDS have been particularly engaged in the preparations for the International Meeting for the ten-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action to be held in Mauritius from 10 to 14 January 2005.

Following the regional meetings late last year, 2004 began with the Inter-regional Meeting in the Bahamas that crafted the Nassau Declaration and the AOSIS Strategy Paper, subsequently endorsed by the Group of 77 and China. This document has been taken as the working basis and was extensively deliberated upon at the three-day open-ended preparatory

meeting in April as well as informal consultations in May and earlier this month under the able leadership of Ambassador Don MacKay of New Zealand.

As several critical issues remain outstanding and further deliberations on these need to begin prior to the formal opening in Mauritius, I would like to recommend that the General Assembly, following up its own resolution, acknowledge that the informal consultations envisaged on 8 and 9 January 2005 in Mauritius are required.

We must now carry to Mauritius the laudable spirit of goodwill as well as the genuine objective of achieving a worthwhile, implementable outcome that have been visible throughout the preparatory process among all stakeholders. The Mauritius outcome should not only generate a renewal of global commitment to the development of SIDS but at the same time bring about positive, tangible, qualitative changes in the lives of their people within a shorter timeframe.

Mr. Chairman,

As the Secretary-General of the Mauritius International Meeting, I would also like to take this opportunity to briefly inform this Committee of the preparations being made for the Meeting.

From the side of the United Nations, invitations to participate at the highest level possible have gone out to all member states and observers of the United Nations as well as non-UN members, civil society and non-governmental organizations as envisaged in the Provisional Rules of Procedure of the conference. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has written individually to all heads of State or Government to participate personally. I take this opportunity to reiterate to member states to send delegations to the Mauritius Meeting at the highest level possible. An early advice about such high level participation will be appreciated. Furthermore, the participation of the major groups identified in Agenda 21 and agencies and organizations both within and outside the UN system will be essential. I emphasize the full participation by the multilateral financial institutions, in particular the Bretton Woods institutions, the private sector, NGOs and other civil society organisations. Such broad-based engagement is absolutely important for a meaningful outcome and effective follow-up, while at the same time

demonstrating the international community's strong and unwavering support to the Small Island Developing States.

Mr. Chairman,

I also continue to stress the need for a greater involvement of regional intergovernmental organizations in promoting the implementation of the Mauritius outcome, as well as engaging them more constructively in monitoring the implementation process. Monitoring should not only be an exercise in stocktaking but should be a more proactive and dynamic process. As I have been emphasizing, the regional organizations have a much better knowledge of the capabilities and capacities of their respective regions. They should be supported in these endeavours by the concerned United Nations entities so that we harness the full potentials of the SIDS in their respective regions for effective and efficient follow up of the Mauritius outcome.

I also believe that it would be worthwhile if the High Level Segment of the International Meeting could devote some focussed attention to the practical ways of carrying forward the further implementation of the Barbados Programme. The guidance of the leadership gathered in Mauritius in this regard will be invaluable.

Mr. Chairman,

Under the agenda item on Sustainable Development, we are also discussing the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. This subject is of particular relevance to the most vulnerable countries of the world – the Least Developed, Landlocked and Small Island Developing Countries which are regularly ravaged by natural disasters overwhelming these countries in their uphill efforts towards sustainable development. The limits on their capacities are well-known. Over and above, the impediments of geography, especially for the landlocked and the small islands, are one of the most debilitating factors in their development efforts. Ten years ago the milestone World Conference in Yokohama, Japan declared that “the impact of natural disasters in terms of human and economic losses has risen in recent years, and society in general has become more vulnerable to natural disasters. Those usually most affected by natural and other disasters are the poor and socially disadvantaged groups in developing countries as they are least equipped to cope with them”. This assertion is still valid, if not in more dramatic terms.

The Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World was formulated centering on the objective of saving human lives and protecting property. It is worth reminding ourselves that the Strategy called for “development of a global culture of prevention as an essential component of an integrated approach to disaster reduction and ... adoption of a policy of self-reliance in each vulnerable country and community comprising capacity-building as well as allocation and efficient use of resources.”

The Yokohama Strategy agreed to “give priority attention to the developing countries, in particular the least developed, landlocked countries and the small island developing States”. It also emphasized “the need for the United Nations system to pay special attention to the least developed and landlocked countries and small island developing States”. Referring to the outcome of the first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s, the Strategy called for giving “priority attention to Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries in the activities of the International Decade for Disaster Reduction”. It also supported efforts of Governments at the national and regional levels in the implementation of the priority areas of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s, and the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, related to the management of natural and environmental disasters.

Last week’s observance of the International Day for Disaster Reduction and the global campaign focussing on the theme “Learning from today’s disasters for tomorrow’s hazards” as well as the release last July of the global review titled “Living with Risk” have set the scene for the Kobe World Conference on Disaster Reduction next January. It is necessary that the main thrust of the Yokohama Strategy for the most vulnerable countries should be reiterated, taking into account the Brussels and Almaty Programmes of Action and the Mauritius outcome. There should be clearer directions and priorities for action at international, regional, national and local levels to ensure implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), and to support the achievement of the objectives of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Development Goals. Specific initiatives and partnerships should be launched to support the most vulnerable of our fragile planet.

Mr. Chairman,

Coming to another sub-item of today's agenda, on a broader level, the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification is linked to the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. As I had underscored in the past in this Committee, from an LDC perspective, particularly in respect of African countries, the implementation of the Convention to combat desertification is inextricably linked to and indeed is part and parcel of efforts to eradicate poverty and bring about sustainable human development. The implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification and development efforts are both issues of urgency in view of the vulnerability of these countries to the effects of desertification, climate change and diminishing biological diversity. Dwindling land, marine and agricultural resources compound the existing staggering problems facing the social sectors and economic development. The population pressure on decreasing resources needed to sustain livelihoods and development and the consequences of such pressure create obstacles to the attainment of set socio-economic objectives.

It is imperative to sustainably consolidate and strengthen the implementation and reporting activities and mechanisms of these three Conventions. It is equally imperative to strengthen international cooperation and partnerships in order to ensure the effective carrying out of all aspects set out in these Conventions.

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