

Highlights of the Mauritius International Meeting on small islands (10 January)

Conference Secretary-General Chowdhury calls for ODA increase

At the opening ceremony of the International Meeting to review the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of the Small Island Developing States, today 10 January in Mauritius, the Secretary-General of the meeting, Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury, urged development partners to increase their official development assistance (ODA) to these vulnerable countries. Urging the international community to assist small island developing countries, he said, "The smallness and the remoteness of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) continue to pose serious problems in providing international aid and enhancing foreign investments. Projects and programmes in many cases are not viable when targeted for specific countries. On the other hand, when SIDS band together to integrate their economies and meet common challenges, many of the social, economic and human development projects and programmes could prove viable and yield better results. I therefore urge the small island developing countries to increase their efforts to hasten the pace of regional economic integration."

Mauritian Prime Ministers invites conference to address tsunamis

The Prime Minister of the Host Country, Mauritius, Mr. Paul Berenger, was elected President of the International meeting. Addressing the Conference, he said, "There are a number of lessons to be learnt from the tragedy that resulted from the tsunami. Many lives could have been saved had there been an appropriate early warning mechanism in the Indian Ocean. This meeting should therefore over the next few days seriously consider concrete recommendations regarding the setting up of early warning systems and methods of operating them."

Climate change, rather than trade, will be the most contentious issue

Very encouraging progress was recorded during the informal negotiations held over the week-end in Mauritius, during which a number of tough issues were settled. On trade, half of the brackets were removed during intensive negotiations held by a sub-group of countries. Given these positive

developments, it is now expected that climate change will be the most controversial issue of the current negotiations, rather than trade.

On natural disasters, it had previously been agreed to negotiate the issue of disaster preparedness during the Kobe Conference, next week in Japan. But delegates in Mauritius agreed to introduce paragraphs about tsunamis. The International Meeting will adopt a proactive strategy to further implement the Programme of Action which was agreed a decade ago at a Global Conference in Barbados. A political declaration should also be adopted.

20 heads of States and government

By Friday, the International Meeting will have been attended by some 2000 participants. More than 20 heads of States and governments, some 35 ministers, and the United Nations Secretary-General, will take part in the high-level segment of this International Meeting, on Thursday and Friday.

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