

UN CONFERENCE ON SMALL ISLAND STATES OPENS IN MAURITIUS WITH FOCUS
ON THEIR CONTINUED ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL VULNERABILITY

Early Warning System for Indian Ocean,
Impact of Climate Change Among Issues Raised on First Day

A crucial United Nations conference on the future of small island developing States opened here today, after a year in which their special economic and environmental vulnerabilities were given worldwide attention following a series of devastating Caribbean hurricanes and the recent deadly Asian tsunami.

Representatives from the islands, donor partners and others have gathered in Port Louis, Mauritius for the week-long International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

The Programme of Action, approved by the 1994 United Nations Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, addressed climate change, tourism, natural disasters, wastes, freshwater, land resources, energy, biodiversity and transport. The Mauritius Meeting is also expected to address emerging issues that affected small islands such as trade, HIV/AIDS, information technology and the economic potential of island cultures.

Anwarul K. Chowdhury, Secretary-General of the Mauritius Meeting, said the task for the assembled delegates was a critical one for small island developing States. Despite the efforts made by those states, the expectations for international support and cooperation for the implementation of the Barbados Programme had not materialized. The smallness and the remoteness of such countries continued to pose serious problems in providing international aid and enhancing foreign investments.

The decisions articulated here, he said, would greatly facilitate all stakeholders in charting the course of multilateral cooperation for implementing the priorities set out in Mauritius. "But if we are to make meaningful headway with the Barbados Programme, if we are to tackle the new and emerging issues that now confront the SIDS and if we are determined to put these most vulnerable countries on a surer path to sustainable development, then the priorities that are set in Mauritius must not only be realistic and achievable, but should command the full and genuine support of the international community."

Following his election as President of the International Meeting, Prime Minister Paul Raymond Berenger of Mauritius said that the economic and environmental vulnerability of the majority of small

island States had, in fact, increased significantly since Barbados. It was, therefore, imperative for small island States to build economic and social resilience, as a part of achieving sustainable development. "This is indeed a defining moment for the future of small island developing States", he added, "and we have no room for error."

The tsunami disaster, he said, also resulted in several lessons learned; many lives could have been saved had there been an early warning system in the Indian Ocean. For that reason, the meeting should concentrate on setting up such a system in the region. Noting that the year 2004 had been a destructive year in terms of natural disasters, he said no small island State region was spared from such phenomenon, with the Pacific and Caribbean suffering the most.

The ten-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action provided an opportunity for small island States to look back and develop key priority areas, he said. The lack of human and economic resources and the transfer of technology had adversely impacted the implementation of the Programme. New emerging issues, such as HIV/AIDS and globalization, as well as a new emphasis on security, had further slowed down the implementation efforts. Despite those setbacks, small island States had reaffirmed the Barbados Programme of Action as the essential blueprint for their sustainable development. The 1994 commitment still remained valid today, he added.

An afternoon panel discussion, the first of five planned over the course of the next three days, focused on the environmental vulnerabilities of small island developing States. Among the issues raised was the need for promoting and sharing new technologies; the role of partnerships; reducing the vulnerability of small island developing States by producing a range of energy options for them; and the link between poverty and vulnerability.

At the outset of the morning meeting participants observed a minute of silence in memory of those who lost their lives in the Asian tsunami. Statements were also made this morning by a number of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as well as inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Also this morning, the International Meeting elected Pravin Kumar Jugnauth, Deputy Prime Minister of Finance and Economic Development of Mauritius, as Vice-President ex-officio of the Meeting; Christopher Fitzherbert Hackett of Barbados as Rapporteur-General; and Don MacKay of New Zealand as Chairman of the Main Committee.

Elected as Vice-Presidents of the Meeting were Cape Verde, Morocco, Tuvalu, Nauru, Timor-Leste, Croatia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Belize, Bahamas, Barbados, Italy, Belgium and New Zealand.

The meeting will reconvene at 10 a.m. Tuesday, 11 January, with a panel discussion on special treatment for small island developing States.

Background

The International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, adopted in Barbados in 1994, met this morning to begin

its week-long session. For background, see Press Release ENV/DEV/SIDS/1 issued on 10 January.

Opening Statements

ANWARUL K. CHOWDHURY, Secretary-General of the Mauritius International Meeting, said the international community was meeting in Mauritius at a time of terrible death and destruction caused by the Asian tsunami two weeks ago. Under the leadership and guidance of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the United Nations immediately mobilized its energy and resources and was taking every possible step in cooperation with the rest of the international community to cope with the calamity brought by that unprecedented disaster. The disaster highlighted the need for the international community to address the need for early warning systems and the special vulnerabilities of small islands.

The task before the Meeting was a critical one for the small island States. Despite the efforts made by them, the expectations for international support and cooperation for the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action had not materialized. Against that somber backdrop, he was happy to note that many small island States had introduced domestic reforms in macroeconomic policies to facilitate their integration into the global economy. At the regional level, small island States had made advances in putting into place appropriate arrangements to integrate their economic, social and environmental approaches to achieve sustainable development. Those actions would undoubtedly help them to maximize the opportunities available to them and move forward post-Mauritius.

However, he continued, the smallness and the remoteness of the small island States continued to pose serious problems in providing international aid and enhancing foreign investments. Projects and programmes in many cases were not viable when targeted for specific countries. On the other hand, when small island States banded 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. Therefore, he urged the small island developing countries to increase their efforts to hasten the pace of regional economic integration.

Increased South-South cooperation, particularly among small island States themselves, had the potential to enhance their sustainable development efforts, an opportunity that curiously did not find any mention in the Barbados Programme. Besides the sustainable development issues in the context of Barbados, several new and emerging issues, relating in particular to trade, security and HIV/AIDS, had surfaced and would receive the much deserved attention of the international community represented here.

The decisions articulated at the International Meeting would greatly facilitate all stakeholders in charting the course of multilateral cooperation for implementing the course of multilateral cooperation for implementing the priorities set out here in Mauritius. "But if we are to make meaningful headway with the Barbados Programme, if we are to tackle the new and emerging issues that now confront the SIDS and if we are determined to put these most vulnerable countries on a surer path to sustainable development, then the priorities that are set in Mauritius must not only be realistic and achievable, but should command the full and genuine support of the international community."

In the true spirit of collaborative partnership that was envisaged here, donor countries, development partners, civil society, the private sector, United Nations agencies and the small island States themselves

would all be involved in implementing the decisions of the Meeting. He urged development partners in particular to increase their official development assistance (ODA) to small island States. At the national level, governments must adopt policies promoting the establishment of an enabling environment, as well as coordinate and bring together the efforts and resources of all to meet the objectives that were set.

At the regional level, he urged that for purposes of coordination and monitoring, regional organizations and especially intergovernmental regional organizations with the support of the United Nations system should expand and enrich their role. He called on the International Meeting to come up with concrete measures to enhance implementation of priorities identified here. For its part, the United Nations system would continue to be a true partner of the small island developing States.

PAUL RAYMOND BERENGER, Prime Minister of Mauritius, speaking in his capacity as the elected President of the International Meeting, recalled that the meeting was the first major United Nations international conference that was taking place following the catastrophic tsunami, which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and resulted in extensive damage in several Indian Ocean countries. While the mainland of Mauritius was spared significant damage, the Mauritian island of Rodrigues sustained extensive damage. The disaster, he added, also resulted in several lessons learned; many lives could have been saved had there been an early warning system in the Indian Ocean. For that reason, the meeting should concentrate on setting up such a system in the region.

The year 2004 had been a destructive year in terms of natural disasters, he continued. Small island States were especially affected by natural disasters; no small island State region was spared from such phenomenon, with the Pacific and Caribbean suffering the most. Small island States had supported relief efforts for the recovery of those countries affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami. Moreover, those disasters demonstrated the extreme vulnerability of small island States in all aspects. The capital of Maldives, for example, was still under sea water and Tuvalu and other countries were threatened by rising sea levels. Those islands, and others, would take years to recover the damage they sustained and enormous financing would be required to help them regain their livelihood.

The ten-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action provided an opportunity for small island States to look back and develop key priority areas. The lack of human and economic resources and the transfer of technology had adversely impacted the implementation of the Programme. New emerging issues, such as HIV/AIDS and globalization, as well as a new emphasis on security, had further slowed down the implementation efforts. Despite those setbacks, small island States had reaffirmed the Barbados Programme of Action as the essential blueprint for their sustainable development. The 1994 commitment still remained valid today, he added.

The Prime Minister expressed his hope that the final outcome document adopted at the end of the meeting would contain practical measures to address the areas of concern to small island States, including the new and emerging issues. He called on all delegations to reach an understanding, particularly in areas of climate change and trade issues. The meeting was an opportunity to deepen understanding of the most critical concerns. Social, economic and environmental threats would also be addressed in panel events scheduled during the course of the weeklong gathering.

The economic and environmental vulnerability of the majority of small island States had, in fact, increased significantly since Barbados, he

said. It was, therefore, imperative for small island States to build economic and social resilience, as a part of achieving sustainable development. It was the intention of his delegation to propose the adoption of a political declaration intended to express the will of the international community to support the development of small island States. "This is indeed a defining moment for the future of small island developing States", the Prime Minister added, "and we have no room for error."

HAMDALLAH ZEDAN, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity, while expressing condolences to the people and governments of the Indian Ocean countries affected by the recent tsunami, said natural disasters such as last week's disaster served to underline the vulnerabilities of low-lying coastal areas and reinforced the urgency of the full implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action in all its aspects. The Barbados Programme served as a reminder that many of the threats to the sustainable development of small islands considered by governments then were today still a reality. Small islands remained particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, climate variability and sea level rise, and they continued to have little control over the underlying causes.

The Barbados Programme and its review document recognized the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, which underpinned the livelihood and food security of islanders. Marine and coastal areas, in particular, were key ecosystems for islands, given the functions and services they provided, and as a source of income. Island biodiversity was of significance at the global scale, as many of the insular systems included sites with a high concentration of biodiversity. The isolation of island environments had resulted in the evolution of endemic and characteristic flora and fauna. Moreover, the global significance of island biodiversity placed small island States in a unique position in the achievement of the target by the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which aimed at the substantive reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss by the year 2010.

Mr. Zedan recalled that all small island States were parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, and that most of them had ratified the Biosafety protocol. Most of the small island States were striving to achieve the objectives of the Convention, namely the conservation of biological diversity, the use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. Provisions and tools developed by the Convention had also contributed to achieving the objectives set out in the Barbados Programme of Action. The high susceptibility of small island States to natural and human-related hazards, their distance from the mainland, the fragility of island biota, as well as economic vulnerabilities, among other things, prompted the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to develop a work programme on island biological diversity for consideration at its next meeting, he said.

HETTY SARJEANT, delivering the statement of Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), said that investing in people, particularly women and young people, was a surefire way to advance economic and social development. Progress depended on a healthy and educated population. Population was about knowing where people were, what they needed to improve their lives and responding to those needs. Fertility and mortality rates were largely determined by access to education and health services. Reproductive health services were particularly important because those services contributed directly to the Millennium Development Goals to reduce poverty, improve maternal health, reduce child mortality and slow the spread of HIV and AIDS.

She added that achieving sustainable development required striking a balance between population, resources and consumption. That balance, which required sound planning and policy-making, had a direct impact not only on the prospects and opportunities for the current generation, but also for future generations. That balance also required the sound management of natural resources. Another pressing challenge, painfully highlighted by the recent tsunami, was the management of natural disasters. The Fund was working within the United Nations system and with other partners to mount a coordinated and effective response. Early preparation and warning systems were absolutely critical.

The majority of small island States had taken actions to integrate reproductive health in their primary health system and to make those services more widely available. That was good news because reproductive health and rights were key to the advancement of women, the health of a population, poverty reduction, and the fight against AIDS. She was happy to report that small island States recognized the importance to development of gender equality and women's empowerment. All 37 small island States that responded to UNFPA's survey to measure progress since the Cairo Population Conference reported measures to protect the rights of women and girls. However, areas of major concern remained gender-based violence and the political participation of women. The Fund would continue to work with small island States to improve human well-being and the protection of natural resources.

BARBARA BENTEIN, area representative for Comoros, Madagascar and Mauritius of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), said that approximately 40 per cent of the population of small island States was children. Similar to other children of the world, they had rights recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Just as the economies of such States were fragile, their children were equally exposed. The recent tsunami had provided a stark picture of the risks run by those countries and their children. The UNICEF was working flat out in the coordinated effort to bring aid to populations, and particularly to children. It did so in four ways: by keeping the surviving children alive; taking care of the children separated from their families; protecting children from exploitation; and restoring normality in the lives of the children by, among other things, allowing them to return to school.

There was a close link between poverty and the vulnerability of States, as well as their ability to prepare for and overcome disasters, she said. Considerable progress had been made in many of the small island nations. The integration of the Millennium Goals in poverty reduction plans had made it possible to devote more resources for programmes for children, combat HIV/AIDS and protect children against abuse and exploitation. Much remained to be done to achieve the Millennium Goals and assure more resources on a predictable basis. The fragility of progress should not be underestimated. Investing more in children and guaranteeing a right to education and health care were among the essence of good economic governance. Mauritius, she noted, had demonstrated that serious investment in children was among the most important investments for the development of nations. Measures for follow-up on the outcome of the meeting would include measures to guarantee and assess policies for children, she added.

DESMOND JOHNS, Director, New York Office of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), said some 40 million individuals currently lived with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, but the virus touched the lives of many more and no country had been spared of its effects. By tracking the weaknesses in societies -- poverty, wide social and economic disparities,

the lack of education, the absence of basic services and gender inequality -- and propelled by ignorance, fear, stigma and discrimination, the epidemic reached the most vulnerable. In doing so, it wreaked a toll that exceeded anything that mankind had ever experienced.

The fact that HIV/AIDS was both a consequence of, and a contributing factor to, underdevelopment had important implications for small island States. The fact that the Caribbean was the second worst affected region, after sub-Saharan Africa, substantiated that assertion. AIDS was now the leading cause of death among adults ages 15 to 44 in the Caribbean. National HIV prevalence now exceeded 2 per cent in the region. While HIV prevalence rates in the Pacific remained generally low, with the possible exception of Papua New Guinea, the signs of vulnerability were starkly evident, especially in the form of high rates of sexually transmitted infections.

Despite the multiple obstacles faced by small island developing States, the countries of the Caribbean had demonstrated that much can be achieved through political will and regional cooperation, by rolling out prevention and treatment programmes that were among the most ambitious in the world. Similarly, the low prevalence rates in the Pacific represented a unique window of opportunity, since the immediate application of intense prevention efforts could avert much more serious epidemics in the near term. In closing, Dr. Johns recalled that the international community had, in the Declaration of Commitment adopted at the United Nations Special Session on HIV/AIDS, a global framework by which to address the problem and will conduct an interim review of progress in June this year.

ANDREY VOLODIN, of United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), said his agency had been traditionally involved in technical assistance aiming specifically at least developed country and small island developing States. In November 2004, the total volume of the officially approved projects for island developing States reached over \$44.5 million. The main areas of UNIDO assistance have been concentrated in the field of small-scale industry development, employment and income generation, capacity-building, export promotion and marine resources, among other things. In that context, UNIDO's participation in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States proved to be a viable contribution to the achievement of its overall goals.

UNIDO's focus, among other things, was on the control and avoidance of greenhouse gas emissions in the developing countries, which was of particular importance for small island States, as a result of their vulnerability to sea level rise. In the field of energy efficiency, rural energy development and cleaner production, UNIDO aimed to achieve sustainable and efficient use of energy through the assessment and the analysis of the existing situation, introduction of new technologies, enhancement of energy-efficient measures and conducting energy audits in manufacturing plants. In its attempts to assist small island States to upgrade their agro-industries, UNIDO had provided technical and economic support to link industry with agriculture through processing technologies. UNIDO had also focused efforts on, among other things, providing comprehensive industrial policy support, and assisting in the formulation of policies aimed at improving industrial competitiveness in export and domestic markets.

In conclusion, Mr. Volodin said, to promote investment, UNIDO concentrated on creating in small island States an enabling environment that would attract investment and technologies, strengthen institutional infrastructure and improve access to information on markets and the

capabilities of developing countries to attract and negotiate investment inflows and technology transfer.

RUDOLF BUITELAAR, Officer-in-Charge, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, said that through its Caribbean headquarters in Trinidad and Tobago, the Commission had been intimately involved in the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action in the Caribbean region. Much had been accomplished by the small island developing States of the Caribbean, for the most part on the basis of their own resources, in such areas as climate change, coastal zone management, waste management and tourism.

Moreover, Caribbean small island States had acquired an enhanced understanding of the sustainable development process and had established a range of institutions and management modalities, such as environmental management authorities and national biodiversity strategies and action plans. Nevertheless, Caribbean island States would need to draw attention to the constraints they continued to face in building resilience to confront the several dimensions of their vulnerability.

The Commission recommended that the international meeting address the shortfalls and gaps in the implementation of the Programme of Action; support small island States in building resilience to confront their vulnerability; address new and emerging issues; take concrete steps towards the finalization of the indices of economic, social and environmental vulnerability; lend concrete support to cooperation at the regional and interregional levels among the small island States themselves; and establish benchmarks and other means of measuring the progress of the future stages of the implementation process. The Commission remains well placed to make a significant contribution to the translation of the outcomes of the Meeting into concrete initiatives, projects and activities for the benefit of all Caribbean small island States.

COSMOS L. ZAVAZAVA, Head of Unit for Least Developed Countries and Chief of Business Development in the International Telecommunication Union, said the four key themes that could address the subject of "smart solutions for promoting sustainable development" for small island States were vision, innovation, policy-making and networking. What was needed now was a renewed, forward-looking vision that went beyond the meeting, a vision that was realistic, pragmatic and easily transformed into tangible activities and projects for the benefit of small island States. Information and communication technologies (ICT) served as a "bloodstream" to sustainable development, as they permeated into every facet of human life and played a pivotal role in poverty reduction, trade facilitation, environmental sensing, monitoring for disaster mitigation and relief, e-governance, e-agriculture, distance education delivery and knowledge dissemination.

He said that small island States suffered from a lack of access to wireless technology and other advancing technologies. For progress to be made, it was important that governments played a facilitative role, by putting in place an appropriate policy and regulatory framework to stimulate competition in the ICT sector. ICTs could play a catalytic role in attaining most of the important development targets. Countries should ordinarily initiate programmes and own them; then invite partners to come and provide support for those initiatives. First, organizations involved in funding ICT-related projects must pool resources in order to maximize resource allocation and utilization. Second, entities involved in implementing projects should ideally work together, so as to ensure the interoperability of networks, services, and applications. Third, networking was essential among policy-making bodies -- essentially governments -- so as to attain policy harmonization at all levels. Mr.

Zavazava recalled the symposium on ICT development in the Pacific region in December 2004 and said that during the second quarter of 2005 a similar event was scheduled for the Caribbean small island States. The aim was to focus and develop differentiated solutions for countries and subregions, as "one size fits all" solutions would not go far enough.

As the review of the Barbados Programme of Action was underway, Mr. Zavazava said the role of ICT should be given prominence. For the ITU, it was important that a genuine exchange of ideas be translated into action and the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in 2005 would be a defining moment for that to occur. ICT provided a great opportunity for the rural farmer who wanted to know what the market price was before delivering his products; that small entrepreneur who wanted access to distant markets at affordable costs, that remote clinic in need of expertise that was thousands of miles away, the fisherman who needed to be warned of an impending disaster arising from sudden sea level rises; and the family desperately in need of government services, and who would no longer had to travel hundreds of kilometres to have access to them.

JACQUES DIOUF, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), said that 15 years ago small island States were self-reliant in the area of food. Unfortunately, food insecurity was a problem for them now. Today, more than half of small island States were importing more than 95 per cent of their grains and cereals. If dairy and other products were figured in, more than half of the calories they consumed came from imported food. The FAO had expanded its assistance to small island States. Among other things, it had organized a special ministerial conference on agriculture and small island States in March 1999, leading to the adoption of an action plan on sustainable agriculture in these countries.

Enhancing capacity and reducing constraints were vital to addressing the issue of sustainable food security for small island States, he said. The FAO had launched a special programme to improve food security in the world's poorest food deficit countries. The special programme was operational in 102 countries, including 36 small island States, and reinforced by the FAO's South-South cooperation initiatives. The FAO was also active in fisheries management through, among other things, the establishment of regional fisheries management systems.

An FAO treaty, adopted in June 2004, would ensure that plant genetic resources were conserved and used in a sustainable manner, as well as that their benefits were shared equally, in particular to benefit small island States. The FAO would convene a special small island States conference in Rome in November 2005 relating to the further implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action as it relates to agriculture and fisheries management.

HABIB OUANE, Director, Least Developed, Landlocked and Small Island Developing Countries, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), recalled that it had been 30 years since UNCTAD had been dealing with the problems of small island developing States and had been actively involved in system-wide support to the Barbados Programme of Action. That had materialized through direct support to small island developing States, as a group, research and analysis in related issues, and technical cooperation in a range of areas, from country-specific studies of economic vulnerability to trade and investment-related policy. Moreover, UNCTAD had been supporting the review of the list of Least Developed Countries and specifically, one aspect of that area that was entirely relevant to small

island developing States, namely the graduation from Least Developed Countries status.

Mr. Ouane underlined that the General Assembly had passed a resolution passing the Maldives from Least Developed Countries status after a three-year transition period just one week before the devastating tsunami struck it. The Maldives suffered the hardest blow in proportion to its size and narrow economic base, causing a major setback in its development.

The international community should endeavor to create sound incentives for graduation through creative thinking, as well as greater solidarity from development partners with the weakest of the countries. As indicated by a recent study of business-related costs conducted by the Commonwealth Secretariat and UNCTAD, small island developing States incurred higher costs than larger States. That was a determining factor for the reluctance of potential investors. The marginalization of small island States was a measurable fact; their share of global trade diminished by half over the last two decades, from 0.4 per cent of world merchandise exports in 1980 to approximately over 0.2 per cent in 2000. UNCTAD's priority was to pursue conceptual, methodological and statistical work to enhance the credibility of small island States; to continue its work in research and analysis in related issues in line with the Millennium Development Goals; and to carry out further technical cooperation activities.

DAYINA MAYENGA, representative for Indian Ocean Countries of the International Labour Organization (ILO), said that the ILO had participated in the assessments carried out by the United Nations system concerning the recent tsunami. The issues that were emphasized during the Barbados Conference were just as valid today as they were in 1994, whether it was climate change or national disasters, or other challenges. In addition, new challenges had come to the fore, including the globalization of international trade, terrorism and HIV/AIDS. Against that background, the meeting presented a historic opportunity to stimulate international solidarity to come up with new initiatives, as well as to increase financial and technical assistance to small island States, on the basis of international cooperation. It was also an opportunity to reiterate that ILO remained a full stakeholder when it came to mobilizing international partnerships, particularly in relation to the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

The ILO cooperated with small island States on, among other things, implementation of basic labour laws, she continued. No sustainable development was possible without social peace. The ILO took advantage of its tripartite structure to assist countries to promote social dialogue. Given the disastrous consequences of HIV/AIDS, the ILO assigned great priority to the prevention of HIV/AIDS in the work place, access to health care and protection of workers against abuse. The ILO noted that employment was retained in the draft strategy, which had been developed in order to further implement the Barbados Programme of Action. She also noted that national efforts to reduce poverty and improve local governance could not be successful without paying attention to the issue of international governance. The decrease of ODA, as well as trade distortions, was particularly felt by small island States.

RIDHA BOUJABID, International Organization of the Francophone, said it was the hope of his organization that the meeting would come up with a concrete plan of action to address the specific challenges facing small island States, while devoting special attention to the countries affected by last week's disaster in southern Asia. The meeting would hopefully recall the number of commitments that should not be overlooked. Those included commitments in the area of climate change and aspects of

globalization, in terms of trade and development, which should be looked at closely, in order to promote investment in small islands. Emerging security issues, poverty, health issues and cultural diversity should also be addressed.

The International Organization of the Francophone had been working in a concerted fashion with several small island States. During the last summit of the Francophone, it came up with a ten-year plan of action for supporting small island States. That commitment was emphasized at the meeting in Burkina Faso last year. The meeting was intended to come up with a framework to be implemented to optimize the impact of programmes within the organization, as well as to promote the role of regional and international programmes dealing with sustainable development in small islands. The dissemination of information, the strengthening of human capacity resources and promoting education were also key aspects towards the goals of development in those islands. That work should be part of a global effort, which would take into account the needs of those on small islands and provide tangible support.

KENNETH BARBOR, International Hydrographic Organization, said that few amalgamations of States could claim a greater dependence on, or dominance by, the ocean than small islands. The area of the sea under their responsibility dwarfed the terrestrial land they possessed. The ocean dominated their trade, tourism, food supply, health, natural resources, heritage and culture. Their future was dependent on the good stewardship and sustainable development of the ocean. The Barbados Programme of Action was a reasonable map to accomplish that sustainable development. However, he noted that the Programme, and the strategy for further implementation currently under discussion, did not address hydrography as an essential enabler of a maritime State's sustainable development.

Ensuring efficient and safe maritime operations was fundamental to sustainable economic development, he said. The International Hydrographic Organization provided standards and recommended practices and procedures for the collection, processing, distribution and display of hydrographic data. Of the 37 small island States, only 9 were members of the Organization. The Organization advanced many of its initiatives through its 14 regional hydrographic commissions. The Organization was prepared to assist small island States in addressing their obligations with respect to safety of navigation and would welcome their active participation in its regional commissions.

Mr. RETHINAM, Asian and Pacific Coconut Community, said the coconut tree was referred to as the tree of life and coconuts played an important role in more than 22 least developed countries. Coconuts were the mainstay in several countries in addressing poverty, tourism and sustainable development overall. Coconut milk and oil, for example, played a vital role in combating HIV/AIDS. Coconut oil was now being largely used as a dietary supplement and as a source of alternative renewable energy. In many islands, coconuts had been contributing to organic farming, as well. Coconuts were also used for producing handicrafts and employment opportunities were increased as a result. Capacity-building and microcredit facilities were required to improve the social and economic opportunity in small islands.

PYNEE CHELLAPERMAI, Centre for Documentation Research and Training for the South West Indian Ocean, on behalf of the Mauritius Civil Society Forum, said over 200 civil society participants from small island developing States and the "diaspora" had met in the last three days assessing, reviewing and sharing experiences of the last

10 years. Despite the reaffirmation of the relevance and importance of the Barbados Programme of Action in several local, national and regional international fora -- the five-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action in 1999, the Millennium Summit in 2000, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 -- implementation had not been satisfactory. He noted that in 2000 the General Assembly resolved to address the special needs of small island developing States rapidly and in full. It was agreed that mistakes from the last 10 years must not be repeated if the Barbados Programme of Action was to be effectively implemented.

He said the Mauritius Civil Society Forum, in its statement, affirmed their solidarity with the tsunami victims of the Indian Ocean; called for institutionalization of participatory processes at all levels of decision-making; called to small island developing States to urgently develop and accelerate renewable and clean energy programmes; and urged governments to commit and establish instruments and mechanisms that operationalize early warning systems and disaster mitigation and response plans, among other things.

NEIL NETAF, Pacific Concerns Resource Centre, speaking on behalf of the Pacific Region, noted that an assessment of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action over the past 10 years showed several risks associated with its implementation. First, the political will over the last 10 years was weak at the Pacific level. He hoped the meeting would lead to increased political will among the governments and organizations represented here. Second, limitations on funding were an issue. He hoped the funding commitments contained in the Programme of Action would be renewed at this meeting. Third, he noted the inadequate involvement of civil society organizations. Over the last 10 years, the engagement and active involvement of such organizations was inadequate. He hoped the meeting would look to involve such groups further in the Pacific region. Fourth, he hoped partnerships would be strengthened and new alliances formed in the region to implement the strategy for further implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

ZAKYA UZOMA WADADA, Caribbean Network of Integrated Rural Development on behalf of the Caribbean Civil Society, recalled that as part of the preparatory process for the review of the Barbados Programme of Action, civil society organizations of the Caribbean region participated in a Caribbean Civil Society Consultation, which was held in Trinidad and Tobago in October 2003. At the consultation they recalled that the Barbados Programme of Action had been limited and fragmented, reflective of the inconsistencies between government policy and action and which led the Caribbean civil society to question the level of sincere commitment to sustainable development in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Civil Society committed itself to action in partnership with its governments and the international community and reiterated its call for: the integration of the Barbados Programme of Action in the development planning framework of the process of determining policy at all stages; national and regional public awareness and education strategies; and the protection of women in the Caribbean in terms of HIV/AIDS, among other things.

NIRMAL JIVAN SHAH, Nature Seychelles, speaking on the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Mediterranean and South China Seas, said that the tsunami brought into sharp focus the vulnerability of small island States, as well as coastal zones, and the need for preparedness and early warning systems. Vulnerability also pertained to the economic domain. With the end of the multifiber agreement, the sugar protocol and other preferential agreements, the livelihood of small island States communities was severely at risk. Ecological systems were even more fragile. The solution lay with the will

of governments, civil society and international institutions. Civil society, filled with talent, skills and enthusiasm, was part of the solution. "Let us harness this energy ... the only way we can get taller, faster and further is to buckle down and work together, side by side".

GORDON BISHPMAN, Caribbean Policy Development Centre, on behalf of the international organizations, said the task for the meeting was to build consensus, realize financial resources and agree on technical assistance and cooperation agreements. Small island developing States had a high cost of production and there was an added problem of migration. Moreover, local communities did not have the capacity to apply trade initiatives. Small island nations must focus on the sustainability of their people and an agreement must be reached on the strengthening of regional coordinating mechanisms. In general, there was also a need to enforce locally owned infrastructures to ensure sustained growth. Space for foreign investments was also a requirement. In order to build resilience, resources were needed. The international organizations called for the spirit of the negotiations at the meeting to be based on genuine cooperation between the international community partners and small island developing States.

Panel Discussion I

The meeting resumed in the afternoon with a panel discussion on "The environmental vulnerabilities of small island developing States", co-chaired by Tagaloa Tuala Tagaloa, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Samoa, and Marian Hobbs, Minister for the Environment and Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Official Development Assistance of New Zealand.

The panellists for the discussion, moderated by Klaus Topfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), are: Rajendra K. Pachauri, Chairman of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change; Theophilus Ferguson John, Minister for Physical Development, Environment and Housing of Saint Lucia; Salvano Briceno, Director of the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction; Kenrick Leslie, Director of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center in Belize.

RAJENDRA K. PACHAURI, Chairman of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, referring to last month's tsunami in the Indian Ocean region, said there was a need to look at actions that could be taken to minimize the impact of such natural disasters. In terms of climate change, of particular relevance to small island States was the rise of sea levels. The current trends indicated that there would be an increase in global surface temperature, which would contribute to the rising sea levels; water resources were also at risk and coastal areas were suffering from the erosion of beaches. Among the causes of sea level rise were rising temperature, which, for example, resulted in melting glaciers. There were several actions that could be taken to protect human beings and communities from the effects of such climate change. It was not merely the geo-physical impact that was of concern but also socio-economic manifestations. Populations that inhabited small islands were vulnerable to both factors. Small islands, however, were not the only nations to suffer from these effects; coastal countries, such as Bangladesh, were also affected. The international community needed to be concerned about the impact on the species that existed in these areas. Much research was needed to reverse the trends of climate change.

In response to a question on coastal degradation, Mr. Pachauri said protective devices could be set up reduce that risk. He added that coral structures could be of particular value in terms of protecting coastlines.

Asked whether the issue of tsunamis had been scheduled on the meeting's agenda prior to last month's incident in the Indian Ocean, Mr. Pachauri said the subject had always been on the agenda of the meeting, given that tsunamis had long been identified as a real threat to small island communities.

THEOPHILUS FERGUSON JOHN, Minister for Physical Development, Environment and Housing of Saint Lucia, said that almost half of the energy consumed in small island developing States today came from local resources. The other half came from oil imports, which accounted for 25 per cent of total national imports in some countries. The end result was fuel prices that were higher than market prices. Locally produced renewable energy must, therefore, be on the front burner. Renewable sources of energy including biomass, hydropower, wind, solar and geothermal energy had already been used in some small island States.

Small island developing States were also known to exploit lesser known energy sources, he continued. Many small island States had devoted substantial resources to renewable resources, but were hindered by such factors as high initial capital costs, coupled with conservative attitudes towards non-traditional sources of energy. Agricultural waste, as shown in Mauritius, could also be used as a source of energy. It was possible to expand the use of renewable energy sources, and success stories already existed. With sufficient political will, renewable energy could be the answer to some of the problems faced by small island States.

Responding to a question on some of the drawbacks with renewable sources of energy, he said that one of the main problems for island States was capacity. Sometimes the technology was hard to attain, a fact that highlighted the need for partnerships. One of the drawbacks that ought not to be a drawback was the conservatism regarding non-traditional forms of energy. On the issue of scale, he said he did not expect renewable sources of energy to replace fossil fuel immediately. While countries might not have 100 per cent wind or geothermal energy, the percentage could be high enough so as they would not be affected by rising fuel prices.

Mr. BRICEÑO, Director, Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), said natural hazards were inevitable, but the impact of such hazards could be reduced. The disaster impact in small islands was higher than in continental countries and fragile environments and economies of certain small islands were being threatened largely due to their susceptibility to the effects of climate change. Other factors leading to increased vulnerability included the rise of urbanization, poverty, and environmental degradation.

The ISDR aimed to build disaster-resilient communities, which would reduce the socio-economic and human losses, he said. The First World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which took place in Yokohama in 1994, had drafted an action plan, which included actions for small island States. The aim of next week's Conference in Kobe would be to review the Yokohama strategy, commit nations to develop more effective disaster reduction action plans of their own and to

facilitate the implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Moreover, next week's gathering was an opportunity to increase awareness of the risks facing many nations and for the participants to share experiences with one another. In the end, a final declaration was expected to be adopted with specific recommendations for nations, based on identifying risks from natural hazards, sharing knowledge, education, building a culture of resilience and developing preparedness for effective response. The issue of early warning systems would also be at the centre of discussions.

Mr. Briceño called on the meeting's participants to further commit themselves to disaster reduction strategies in all sectors. The World Conference in Kobe would further recommend, among other things, that governments earmark 10 per cent of all humanitarian relief funds for disaster reduction strategies. The current gathering was a great opportunity to address the major commitments already made by countries and identify further commitments that needed to be taken. That would be a tribute to the victims of the tsunami, as well as to those victims of the several other natural disasters that occurred in 2004.

In response to a question, Mr. Briceño said there were some very good early warning systems in place in several regions, by which the populations were quickly mobilized and evacuated when there was a need. Early warning systems, however, were not everywhere. Concerning the link between disaster management and environmental management, Mr. Briceño said UNEP was a key partner with ISDR, whose goal to make environmental managers aware of all natural hazards.

Responding to a question on climate variability, Mr. Pachauri said extreme events were likely to increase as a result of the increase in the use of greenhouse gases; floods and droughts were just two examples of such events.

KENRICK LESLIE, Director of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center in Belize, said that those in the Caribbean were fully aware of the fragility of existence, particularly in light of the increasing frequency of natural disasters. The region had in the past year been hit by hurricanes Francis, Jean and Ivan. It was necessary to become more aware of the human impact of natural disasters. He noted the vulnerability of the Caribbean, which consisted of 28 States and a number of territories. There was an estimated population of 40 million, of which 28 million lived in coastal areas. Economic activities were dominated by agriculture and tourism, and economic growth had failed to keep pace with population growth.

He noted that hurricane Ivan was significantly larger than the country of Grenada. When hurricane Francis hit Florida, the Republican National Convention was taking place in New York. The President of the United States did not have to stop the Convention. On the other hand, when Ivan passed over Grenada, its Prime Minister had to be rescued by another country's ship. The possibility of tsunamis in the Caribbean and the creation of an early warning system were now being explored. There was an underwater volcano in the Caribbean, just north of Grenada. Due to the physical size of small islands, it was virtually impossible to get the population to so-called safe zones. On small islands, there were really no safe

zones. The whole world needed to experience a sense of urgency regarding climate change.

MOHAMED LATHEEF (Maldives), reading a message from the President of the Maldives, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, said that on 26 December 2004, the country woke up to witness the terrible reality of its environmental fragility. The tsunami swept through the entire archipelago of the Maldives with awesome fury; taking lives, devastating infrastructure, crippling its economy and washing away decades of hard work. The tsunami was indeed unprecedented, the worst natural calamity and the first of its kind ever experienced in the Maldives.

The country had now embarked on the formidable tasks of providing emergency relief, rebuilding lives and livelihoods and reconstructing the nation, he continued. Eighty-two people were known to have died and 26 were still missing; 13 islands had to be completely evacuated; and the tourism and fishing industries had been crippled. The total damage was estimated to be well over \$1 billion.

The tsunami disaster was an opportunity to reflect on the fragility of small island States and other low-lying coastal areas, as well as to make important decisions to avert such catastrophes or minimize the losses resulting from natural disasters. On 26 December, the tsunami waves receded within hours. However, the waves and flooding from sea level rise triggered by global warming would not recede. More must be done to protect the global environment. The Kyoto Protocol alone was not sufficient to deal with what was a bleak environmental future for small islands. The unity which followed the tsunami should be harnessed to create mechanisms to deal with future environmental calamities.

RAJESH BHAGWAN, Minister of Environment and Natural Development Unit, Mauritius, said developing new sources of renewable energy was crucial for small islands. Energy sources, in general, consumed a significant portion of the budgets of small island States. Mauritius had turned its attention to using biogas waste from sugar for energy and had been reforming its sugar sector to produce new varieties of sugar cane. Mauritius had further made a pledge to renew its energy sector and was making provision in its new energy bill to account for the use of biogas. Small island States had a tremendous potential for solar energy use and several of them had created "state of the art" mechanisms to utilize that form of energy. He added that capacity-building in small islands was key for effective implementation and management of such energy sources. Mauritius had been encouraging other small island nations to embark on similar projects.

A representative asked about the technological and other conditions needed to set up a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean.

Mr. ZEDAN, from the Convention on Biological Diversity, said that the tsunami had united the world and offered a good opportunity to respond in an integrated manner. The international community knew the problems, causes, and what was needed, as well as the costs of inaction. The question was how to respond in an integrated way.

Addressing its work on renewable energy, the representative of the Global Environment Facility noted that the Facility had various projects in small island developing States. It had recognized that

the potential for realizing renewable energy varied widely among those States. The Facility's projects included the Pacific Islands renewable energy project and another project in the Caribbean on geothermal energy development, as well as projects on wind energy in the Pacific and the Caribbean. There were also projects funded through small grants on biogas in Mauritius.

A representative from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) referred to the International Oceanographic Commission, which under the auspices of his agency stood ready to provide information to other international agencies. UNESCO sought to promote a shift from post-disaster to pre-disaster reaction. Education and communication capabilities were of particular importance to his agency.

A representative of Barbados said her country was exploring the possibilities of using biogas waste for energy. She recalled that a number of countries had developed models to enable early warning systems in the Caribbean. She urged the international community to look closely at the scale of such models being developed and, as echoed by other participants, called for the creation of a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean.

The representation of Indonesia said, with over 17,000 islands, his country understood the special needs and many concerns facing small islands. The Government of Indonesia called for enhanced international cooperation in assisting the development of small island States.

The representative of Kuwait announced that his country had donated some \$100 million to the countries affected by the tsunami to assist with recovery efforts.

The non-governmental organization, CEB International, said invasive species were a disaster for environments and economies and suggested that the prevention of such invasion should be factored into any disaster management programmes.

The representative of Tonga said in order to identify the level of vulnerability with respect to climate change, there was a need to enhance climate monitoring networks. He took the opportunity to announce that a special climate observation system was recently set up in the Pacific region.

Responding to comments from the floor, Mr. BRICENO said that in reviewing the implementation of the Yokohama Plan of Action, significant examples could be seen of what had been achieved. At the same time, it warned of an even higher increase in vulnerability. Even though the world had achieved a lot, the vulnerabilities had increased even more. An early warning system for the Indian Ocean would be dealt with in the coming weeks and would require the participation of the countries in the region.

The need for an integrated response was the greatest challenge, he added. Discussions in next week's Kobe Conference were entirely organized by United Nations agencies. What comes out of Kobe would truly be an inter-agency effort. The discussions would include all the possible causes of tsunamis, including volcanic eruptions and landslides.

Highlighting the need to establish early warning systems, Mr. LESLIE noted that the models being used were not in scale to small island developing States. Models were needed which addressed droughts and variations in rainfall, in order to address the food security issue.

Mr. PACHAURI said small island States were extremely vulnerable to any damage to their ecology and natural resources. In India, those areas with lush mangrove plantations fared better than those areas that did not in the aftermath of the tsunami. He was not aware of solid research on the link between tsunamis and the breaking up of polar ice bodies. A strong information system was needed on what was happening to natural resource systems in SIDS.

Mr. JOHN emphasized the need for those in small island developing countries to work together to form partnerships, so that renewable energy could become what it ought to be in these countries.

Summing up the discussion, Ms. HOBBS stressed the need for leadership to promote new technologies. Not only was it necessary to talk of partnership, but someone was needed to facilitate them. Also raised in the discussion was the need to reduce the vulnerability of small island developing States by producing a range of energy options for them and lessening the dependence on imported fuels; the need to address the specific needs of SIDS in Kobe; and the link between poverty and vulnerability. Also stressed was the need for improved partnership, based on respect for the particular needs of small island developing States.

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