

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

**REMARKS AT MEETING OF THE ALLIANCE
OF SMALL ISLAND STATES
Port Louis, 12 January 2005**

(As **delivered**)

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you today. The Alliance of Small Island States has become an increasingly effective voice in the international arena. You have created and maintained a sense of solidarity among a membership that spans the globe and represents a sizeable segment of humanity. You may be small in size, but your potential is big.

At the Earth Summit in Rio, and at Barbados, Johannesburg and other landmark world conferences, you have capably projected the needs and aspirations of your people. Here in Mauritius, with many of you represented at the highest political level, you have an opportunity to significantly advance the small islands agenda. Indeed, it is notable that tomorrow's high-level segment is devoted not to diagnosis, but to the way forward.

In the same way, I hope you will be engaged in a meaningful way in the consideration of the High Level Panel's Report on Threats, Challenge and Change at the of the General Assembly session in September.

Even before the tsunami struck, this meeting was going to be of crucial importance. Today, as a result of this terrible catastrophe, we can see more clearly not only the challenges facing small islands, but also their relevance for the entire world.

The list of challenges is long. It includes familiar questions such as the risk of natural disasters, isolation from global markets, and high costs for energy and transport. More recently, other issues have come to the fore, such as the impact of climate change, the threat of terrorism, and the potential of information and communication technologies and, of course, the spread of HIV/AIDS,

Your challenge as an alliance here in Mauritius is to ensure that international efforts to promote the well-being of small islands are sustained beyond this meeting.

Much depends on the strength of the official outcome document. It is very encouraging that the outcome is focusing in great detail on implementation and follow-up. But we have seen what happens when consensus is forced at the last minute after a contentious debate, attention and commitment wane rather quickly. So I urge you, I urge you, as you finalize the agreement, to settle on a document that commands the genuine support of all participants, and that has good, realistic prospects for implementation.

This means that small island states will have to establish clear priorities for the period ahead.

You will have to deepen partnerships at all levels – through South-South cooperation; through closer cooperation with developed countries; by engaging more actively with civil society; and by tapping the knowledge and capacities of regional organizations such as CARICOM, the Pacific Islands Forum and the Indian Ocean Commission.

The United Nations system will continue to do its part. We will pay particular attention to advocacy aimed at keeping the issues of concern to small islands prominent on the international agenda. We will also continue to provide technical assistance and help build capacity in a number of areas.

"Small islands, big stakes" is more than a slogan. It is a statement of fact, and an expression of solidarity. In that spirit -- the spirit of Mauritius -- I look forward to working with you and the wider membership of the Organization to chart a sustainable course for all.

Thank you very much.