



GOVERNMENT OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

STATEMENT BY
HONORABLE DR. ERROL CORT
MINISTER OF FINANCE AND THE ECONOMY
TO THE
HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT
OF THE
MAURITIUS INTERNATIONAL MEETING
TO REVIEW THE BARBADOS PROGRAMME OF ACTION
ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

13 January 2005
Port Louis, Mauritius

Mr. President,
Heads of State and Government,
Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

"Greetings"! from the small island developing State of Antigua and Barbuda.

This collective "island" greeting from my government and people to this gathering of the international community is tinged with heartfelt concern for the future: the collective, sustainable development future of small island developing States (SIDS).

This concern is further exacerbated when one considers the overall conclusions of the Secretary General of the United Nations who, in his latest report on SIDS, concludes that, and I quote, "...progress in implementation of the Programme of Action has been mixed. The small island developing States still face major challenges to their sustainable development. Accelerated implementation will require a renewal of political commitment by all States to the Programme of Action and to related international commitments and pledges."

But the overarching goal of this meeting gives me some hope. For if indeed we succeed in "...adopting a proactive strategy to further implement the Programme of Action approved a decade ago at a Global Conference in Barbados...", then we, SIDS, will have taken a further step in achieving the sustainable development future which we all aspire to.

But such a step will require concerted and collective efforts at the national, regional and international levels.

Mr. President,

I am pleased to say to this august gathering that, at the national level, my government has established a socio-economic "compact" with the people of Antigua and Barbuda, which is part of a comprehensive blueprint known as the "Agenda for Change." The Agenda, which incorporates the principles of good governance, transparency, accountability and stakeholder consultations, also serves

as the vehicle through which my government has begun mainstreaming the three (3) pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

On the economic and social front, Antigua and Barbuda is in the process of creating an enabling environment to attract much needed foreign direct investment into our economy, and we have in place the supporting governance structures. These include:

1. annual public sector budgets based on realistic revenue projections and involving stakeholder consultations;
2. a National Strategic Development Plan that will detail the Government's economic programmes for the period 2005-2010;
3. the establishment of an Investment Authority that will serve as a one-stop-shop for investors and will function as an investment promotion and facilitation agency;
4. development of a comprehensive economic diversification strategy;
5. an enhanced Financial Services Regulatory Commission to monitor and assess operations in the international financial services sector, including Internet gaming;
6. the establishment of an Integrity Commission for the purpose of receiving declarations of the affairs of persons holding specific positions in public life, for the purpose of establishing probity, integrity and accountability in public life and for related matters;
7. a Prevention of Corruption Act which, among other things, makes it unlawful for a person to commit an offence by corruptly soliciting or accepting, whether directly or indirectly, property or a benefit or advantage for himself or another person for doing an act or for omitting to do an act in the performance of his/her functions as a public official;
8. a National Economic and Social Council that will promote the goals of economic growth and development, participation in economic decision-making and social equity; and
9. a Freedom of Information Act which is intended to promote maximum disclosure of information in the public interest, to guarantee and facilitate the right of access to information and to provide for effective mechanisms to secure that right.

Given the importance of the contributions of civil society to the sustainable development, my government is making every effort to involve them in all aspects. This is particularly true on the environmental side of the sustainable

development ledger, where we are in the process of finalizing:

1. a National Environmental Management Strategy, which requires the government to collaborate with civil society to develop and implement and promote a programme that will ensure the proper management of our natural resources; and
2. a comprehensive environmental management legislation to ensure effective management of natural resources and coordinated national follow-up to and implementation of our obligations under various international environmental agreements.

Mr. President,

At the regional level, Antigua and Barbuda is a member of the Caribbean Community of nations (CARICOM), one of the first regional integration organizations. The formation of this organization was due in part to the early realisation that, as a region, we face common problems that could best be solved with common approaches.

It therefore should come as no surprise that the Caribbean region is in the process of accelerating efforts towards deeper regional integration, with the eminent implementation of a region-wide Single Market and Economy (CSME).

Hand in hand with the CSME, the region is pressing for greater commitment and more funding for programmes in sustainable development and related areas including disaster mitigation - especially the setting up of early warning systems, vulnerability reduction, resilience building, trade adjustment, energy, tourism and culture.

We are also facing many challenges in the area of agriculture, food production and food security, features we share with many SIDS. As we seek to form partnerships in these areas, we are reminded of the fact that food production and security are vital to reducing our vulnerability as SIDS, and critical to preserving the wellbeing of our people. Consequently, there is no objective or endeavour of greater importance.

Mr. President,

A meeting such as this affords us the unique opportunity to share our concerns with and seek appropriate assistance from the international community. It also provides us with an opportunity to operationalise many of the lessons learnt since the adoption of the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) in 1994. These include broader roles for women, youth and civil society in the further implementation of the BPOA, and developing meaningful partnerships for sustainable development in SIDS among and between all stakeholders.

It is against this backdrop that I wish to highlight some of the urgent concerns of my country. They include: (1) the economy; (2) the environment; (3) new and existing infrastructure; (4) education; (5) healthcare; (6) employment; and (7) good governance. Given these urgent concerns, it is important that the outcomes of this meeting on the agreed priority areas are practical; measurable; implementable and time bound.

Anything short of this would be a disappointment.

Mr. President,

As SIDS, we are facing a future whose only certainty is change.

As SIDS we are confronted with many problems and difficulties - some intrinsic and timeless, others extrinsic and new.

If we are to make progress towards sustainable development we must build capacities; deepen the engagement of civil society, in particular women and youth in the further implementation of the BPOA; strengthened our resilience; reduce our vulnerabilities; and promote problem-solving actions that mobilize key actors and constituencies.

The practical actions we are about to adopt here in Mauritius must therefore encompass the aforementioned.

My country, my region, the SIDS and, indeed, the entire international community are counting on it.

Mr. President,

Let me conclude by thanking you, your government and people of Mauritius, for the warm hospitality extended to all participants at this meeting, and for the excellent facilities provided.

I thank you, Mr. President.