

**CARIBBEAN CIVIL SOCIETY STATEMENT TO THE
SIDS INTERNATIONAL MEETING
MAURITIUS**

January 10th -14th 2005

I bring greetings from the Caribbean to your Excellencies, distinguished delegates and all my brothers and sisters in this struggle for an improved quality of life for the peoples of the world and in particular those of our vulnerable Small Island Developing States and Low-lying Coastal Zones.

We the Caribbean delegates express our sincere appreciation to all those *who* have facilitated our participation at this forum and the government and people of Mauritius *who* have extended to us their warm hospitality and worked to provide this excellent accommodation for our deliberations. I want to extend special thanks and commendation to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and in particular the Honourable Penelope Beckles, Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment for her unprecedented efforts in ensuring the funding of the participation of seven delegates of the NGO sector including five youths, at this International Meeting.

We of the Caribbean also ask that as we deliberate we remember the more than 150,000 women and children who have been lost to the sea and their grieving families who have been left behind. In the months leading up to this SIDS International Meeting, Mother Nature has intervened to bring home to the international community the grave message of the extreme environmental, social and economic vulnerability of Small Island Developing and Low-lying Coastal States. We ask that those whose lives and living spaces have been sacrificed here in this region and in Grenada, Haiti, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Dominica among others in the Caribbean have not been sacrificed in vain and will be vindicated by the successful outcome of this meeting and a commitment to action by all of us present here.

As part of the preparatory process for this comprehensive review of the Barbados Programme of Action for Small Island Developing States, civil society organisations of the Caribbean Region participated in a Caribbean Civil Society Consultation, which was held on the island of Trinidad during the period October 3rd to 5th 2003.

At the 2003 consultation we recalled that in Barbados, Agenda 21 was brought home with the creation of the Barbados Programme of Action, an explicit agenda intended to protect our small island states and low-lying coastal zones from the effects of environmental vulnerabilities, social and economic inequities, institutional and administrative inadequacies, which undermine our efforts towards sustainable development and which make us defenceless potential victims of the ravages of natural disasters.

We also concluded that the implementation of the BPOA has been limited and fragmented, reflective of the inconsistencies between government policy and action and which had led us to question the level of sincere commitment to sustainable development in the Caribbean.

However as we look forward to the future we commit ourselves to action in partnership with our governments and the international community and reiterate our call for: -

- The integration of the BPOA into the development-planning framework of Caribbean SIDS, accompanied by the effective involvement of all stakeholders in the process of determining policy at all stages -design, implementation, monitoring evaluation. This would involve a major reform in governance and the institutionalisation of participatory processes.
- The immediate establishment and strengthening of effective regional and national institutional structures, including NGOs, which would coordinate and facilitate the implementation of action-oriented recommendations arising out of the BPOA, such as the Caribbean SIDS Programme and including the mobilisation of financial resources.
- National and Regional Public Awareness and Education Strategies as regards the BPOA and its linkages to other sustainable development programmes and Multilateral Environmental Agreements
- The development of benchmarks and indicators to ensure effective monitoring and accurate assessments and reporting on the implementation of the BPOA.
- The immediate further development and operationalisation of early warning systems and disaster mitigation and preparedness strategies at regional, national and community levels with particular emphasis on the crucial roles that can be played by NGOS and CBOS and building their capacity to effectively execute these roles.
- The cancellation of the debt of those countries in our region recently ravaged by natural disasters.
- Support for the effective operationalisation of the Caribbean Civil Society Coordinating Mechanism and its resource mobilisation efforts to facilitate the improved networking, information exchange and collaboration among civil society organisations in the region as they work towards being active partners in the implementation of the SIDS BPOA .
- The protection of our Women from the feminisation of HIV/ Aids, continued domestic violence, the respect for their sexual and productive rights and the dismantling of those barriers which inhibit their active involvement in decision-making processes.
- The elimination of violence as a means of conflict resolution by our youth and the growing devaluation of the importance of education and altruistic practices among our young people, the future custodians of our natural resources.

In closing, I ask that we work in spirit, in truth and in sincerity and make decisions which would inspire us to leave Mauritius reenergized, dedicated to action, fully cognisant of the lessons learnt from our past transgressions and ready to revisit our nonchalant attitude towards our national environment and at the same time reflect on those spiritual and cultural traditional practices of our indigenous peoples, developed out of an understanding of the interdependence between people and nature and the need to live in harmony with the natural environment. I pray that the spirits of our ancestors and the energy of our natural forces will be with us in our deliberations and future actions to ensure that ten years from now there will be little to regret and much to celebrate. Thank you.