

**Opening Statement by Honourable Paul Raymond Bérenger, Prime
Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, 10 January 2005
At The United Nations International Meeting To Review The
Implementation Of The Programme Of Action For The
Sustainable Development Of Small Island Developing States,
Swami Vivekananda International Convention Centre
Les Pailles, Mauritius, 10 – 14 January 2005**

**Thank you, Excellency, Mr Anwarul Chowdhury, Secretary
General of the International Meeting,**

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Heads of Delegations,

Distinguished Delegates,

Mauritius is indeed very honoured to be elected
President of this critically important meeting on the
sustainable development of Small Island Developing States.

The Government and people of Mauritius are privileged to host this meeting and I wish you all a very warm welcome to our rainbow Island.

With magnanimous assistance from the Government of India, to which we would like to publicly express our sincere gratitude and thanks, we are able today to meet in this brand new state of the art Conference Centre and that, no doubt, will facilitate the successful deliberations of our meeting.

We thank you all for your presence here, and I am confident that the teachings, philosophy and universal message of brotherhood, solidarity and peace professed by Swami Vivekananda, after whom this centre is named, will inspire our work during this week.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This the first major UN International Conference taking place after the catastrophic tsunami which has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and caused immeasurable material and infrastructural damage in Indonesia, India,

Sri Lanka, Thailand, the Maldives and many other countries around the Indian Ocean. As Secretary General Kofi Annan has said, this has been an unprecedented disaster in the 60 years of the UN. Although Mauritius has been spared, our autonomous island of Rodrigues has sustained extensive flooding and considerable material damage.

Our heart goes out to all those who have suffered and continue to suffer and we wish to reiterate here our heartfelt sympathy and solidarity with all the countries and peoples hit by the tsunami.

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 reflect on concrete recommendations regarding the setting up of early warning systems and methods of operating them. Indeed, this year, as we embark on preparations for the High-level Summit to deal with threats, challenges and change, the UN family must spare no effort in addressing the immediate task of setting up such early warning systems.

2004 has been a particularly destructive year in the area of natural disasters for many countries and in particular for many of our Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) members. Not only have they continued to face the adverse effects of climate change and sea level rise; many of them have also been devastated by a series of hurricanes with unprecedented intensity and frequency. No SIDS region has been spared, the Pacific and Caribbean regions suffering the most.

Within our modest means, Mauritius has supported the relief efforts for the victims of the tsunami and likewise, we also decided to bring our financial token contribution as a mark of solidarity to the disaster relief and recovery funds in the Bahamas, Cayman Islands, Grenada and Jamaica.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These disasters have once again demonstrated the extreme vulnerability of Small Island Developing States in all aspects. Male, the capital of Maldives, still under sea water; Tuvalu devastated by king tides; Niue flattened by

cyclone Heta; Bahamas, Grenada, Jamaica and Haiti battered by successive hurricanes, are the most recent illustrations of our vulnerability. The damage sustained by these islands will take years to repair and significant amount of resources, in some cases equivalent to several times their annual GDP, will be required for reconstruction.

While every effort should be made to bring most urgent assistance to the victims of such disasters, we should not lose sight of other important aspects of the development of SIDS. The 10 year Review of the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) has provided us an opportunity to look back at our efforts to sustainably develop our countries with the support of our development partners. The preparatory process started over two years ago and culminated in the Bahamas SIDS Interregional Ministerial meeting where the draft strategy for the further implementation of the BPOA was adopted. The review has highlighted the causes of the poor implementation of the programme. Dearth of resources, poor human and institutional capacity, lack of technology transfer combined with the absence in some cases of a global, holistic and integrated approach to sustainable development have adversely impacted upon the implementation of the programme. In addition, new

emerging issues, such as HIV/AIDS, globalization and the erosion of trade preferences traditionally favouring SIDS as well as new emphasis on security have further slowed down our implementation efforts.

Despite these challenges to its implementation, SIDS have unanimously reaffirmed the continued validity of the Barbados Programme of Action as the essential blueprint for their sustainable development. As rightly pointed out by Honourable Erskine Sandiford, the then Prime Minister of Barbados at the Barbados Meeting in 1994, “*no strategy for sustainable development will be effective unless its focus is on people including children and women and in full partnership with all relevant players*”. This observation made in Barbados in 1994 still remains valid today.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to learn that there has been good progress made on the Strategy Document in the course of the three informal rounds held in New York and during the two-day pre-meeting here on Saturday and Sunday. Let me take this opportunity to thank and congratulate the

Distinguished Permanent Representative of New Zealand, H.E. Ambassador Don Mackay, for his outstanding facilitatorship of the process. I do hope that the final outcome document of our meeting will be one of general consensus with action-oriented, concrete and practical measures to address the areas of concern to SIDS as identified in the BPOA as well as the new and emerging issues. I urge for continued flexibility and understanding on the part of all delegations so as to reach agreement on outstanding issues, in particular climate change and trade.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This International Meeting as presently structured offers us all an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the most critical concerns of SIDS. The five panels around the pillars of sustainable development should allow us to have free and frank discussions on the social, cultural, economic and environmental threats, challenges and opportunities which SIDS face in achieving sustainable development. And the Panel on resilience building will no doubt help us identify ways and means to increase our overall resilience in the face of our vulnerabilities. For the economic and environmental vulnerability of the majority of

SIDS has in fact increased significantly since the adoption of the BPOA. It is therefore imperative for SIDS to build social, economic and environmental resilience as part of a process of achieving sustainable development.

The Interactive Round Tables during the High Level Segment focusing on the way forward through the mobilization of resources, capacity building and transfer of technology should produce targeted action and concrete recommendations which will allow for the full and effective implementation of our agreed strategy. In this regard, I will return with more details in my statement during the High-level Segment on Thursday 13 January 2005.

But let me take this opportunity to state that it is the intention of my delegation to propose the adoption of a Political Declaration which would reiterate the commitment of the international community in providing all the necessary support and assistance for the sustainable development of Small Island Developing States.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is indeed a defining moment for the future of Small Island Developing States *et nous n'avons pas droit à l'erreur.*

Before I conclude, I wish you very successful deliberations and hope you do find time to visit the island and to meet your sisters and brothers here in Rainbow Mauritius.

Thank you.