



Speech by

**The Parliamentary Secretary
for Foreign Affairs and Trade
The Hon Bruce Billson MP**

At the

International Meeting to Review the Implementation
Of the Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of
Small Island Developing States

10 44 January 2005

Les Pailles Conference Centre,
Port Louis, Mauritius

13 January 2005

(Check against delivery)

Mr President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege for me to be here today to speak at this important meeting.

I would like to thank our hosts, the Government of Mauritius, and the United Nations and its agencies, for organising the conference which has given all of us the opportunity to transform shared purpose into shared action to promote stability and prosperity in the Small Island Developing States.

But I would, first of all, like to take this moment to register Australia's deepest condolences and sympathies to those countries and their peoples who have suffered so dreadfully as a result of the catastrophic Asian tsunami disaster of 26 December.

The Australian people have been deeply touched by the magnitude of the disaster and the horrendous loss of life - including the lives of our own citizens - as well the suffering the tsunamis have inflicted on our close neighbours to our north. The Australian people and Australian companies have privately donated in excess of A\$150 million to relief efforts in the aftermath of the tsunamis.

The Australian Government has also responded quickly and generously to assist the international relief efforts. Australians were among the very first to undertake relief efforts in Aceh and other affected areas. At the Special ASEAN Leader's Summit on the Aftermath of the Earthquake and Tsunami, Prime Minister John Howard announced an A\$1 billion relief and reconstruction package bringing our total direct financial contribution to relief efforts to A\$1.06 billion.

Our emergency assistance has also included civilian medical teams, aircraft to help in searches, and disaster victim identification teams, as well as food, medicines and fresh water. Even teachers and scientific experts have been sent by Australia to help our friends and neighbours in their time of need.

A large proportion of our ongoing contribution is targeted for reconstruction in Indonesia but also includes commitments to Thailand, Sri Lanka, Maldives, India, Myanmar, East Africa and the Seychelles.

In the wake of the recent tsunami disaster, every Indian Ocean country will look to ways to mitigate the impact of such events occurring in the future. We are gratified that many countries have come forward to pledge financial and technical support to establish an effective and durable tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean.

In establishing a system, Australia considers that it must be tailored to the particular requirements of regional countries. Regional countries must be the ones to determine the shape and nature of the system. We can learn from the Pacific Ocean early warning system which has a long history of successful coordination and operation. Australia is open to explore ideas about the best institutional arrangements for an early warning system and we are optimistic that the international meeting scheduled for 18-22 January in Kobe should contribute to shaping the way forward.

All of us gathered here in Mauritius for this conference share a strong commitment to helping Small Island Developing States face their development challenges with confidence and to achieve greater prosperity and security.

Australia is perhaps more aware than many developed nations of the issues confronting Small Island Developing States today

the prosperity and stability of the many island nations in our own neighbourhood of the Asia-Pacific are of great importance to us.

Australia is now more deeply engaged with our Pacific neighbours than ever before. This engagement has been driven in part by new concerns and emerging challenges confronting the region:

including in light of the changed international security environment and the threat posed by international and transnational crime as well as the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

We are working directly with our friends and neighbours in the Pacific as they address their development challenges. Our approach is underpinned by open dialogue with our partners and is driven by their priorities and capacities.

Our efforts are founded upon a shared commitment to joint policy dialogue, common strategic approaches and common work programs. They recognise that poverty reduction requires a stable environment in which real economic growth can flourish and sustain development gains. Aid alone is not enough. It is the strategies that promote prosperity that will provide the antidote to poverty.

As constructive and practical contributors to programs shaped and driven by our partner countries in the Pacific we are now more "hands-on" in how we work with their governments and communities. This includes supporting efforts to:

- stimulate economic growth in line with national plans and strategies
- address unsustainable population growth
- ensure delivery of adequate health and education services
- address pressing health challenges such as the spread of HIV/AIDS, which is of such great concern to us all
- build law and order capacity and achieve better border security

and - crucially - promote good governance.

Our approach aims to place Australian assistance firmly within the context of a country's own national development framework. Clear national development strategies also help us better collaborate and coordinate efforts with our donor colleagues - like our friends from New Zealand - with whom we are co-funding programs with Pacific partners.

Our new Pacific regional aid strategy, announced in December, will guide our aid activities for the next five years.

I am also pleased to report that, together with our regional partners and through the Pacific Forum, we are successfully implementing an active regional agenda which aims to promote closer regional cooperation and pooling of regional resources.

I strongly believe that it is through such a 'hands on' approach working bilaterally with our Pacific Island partners and at the same time supporting the efforts of our regional partners that Australia is able to make a sound, practical and relevant contribution to the sustainable development, security and prosperity of the Small Island Developing States of our most immediate neighbourhood.

Conclusion

The Ten Year Review of the Barbados Program of Action offers a timely opportunity for us to come together — donors and SIDS themselves — to keep up the momentum for action.

We all must now support and implement policies and action stemming from this meeting that will promote growth, provide prosperity and give long term sustainability to Small Island Developing States.

Thank you.