



*Permanent Mission
of Barbados to
the United Nations*



STATEMENT BY

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TO THE

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

OF THE

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING TO REVIEW
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

JANUARY 13, 2005

Port Louis, Mauritius

Mr President, Mr Secretary General, fellow Heads of State and Government, Ministers, distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The name of Barbados will forever be associated with the efforts of the global community to address development issues if for no other reason than that it was the location of the first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States ten years ago.

Two years earlier, at the Rio Summit, world attention had been focussed on the precarious state of Planet Earth, and on the urgent need to restore the balance between man and nature. Agenda 21 emerged as a response to the call for: "development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

The Barbados Conference had the distinction of being the first attempt at translating the framework of Agenda 21 into a specific Action Plan for a particular category of countries. It had an even more interesting distinction, in that the category of countries in question, the Small Island Developing States, or SIDS, as we came to be known, had not readily been accepted as such by the wider membership of the United Nations. We were in effect charting new ground.

The entire negotiating process therefore was coloured by an atmosphere of resistance from some quarters within the developing world to the legitimacy of a special programme for a special category named SIDS. There was also evidence of an effort by some from the developed world to ensure that this test case for Agenda 21 implementation was kept to the most modest of levels possible. It was against these formidable odds that the Barbados Programme of Action was born.

It is entirely relevant to remind ourselves of those circumstances as we pause, a decade later, to review the progress that has been made and to chart the way forward. It is clear that implementation has been uneven, levels of international financial support have been low and results have fallen far short of expectations. However, it can never be said that the energetic and persistent diplomatic effort which we expended to create and nurture the Barbados Programme of Action has been to no avail. Nor can the national and regional actions that were joined to the cause ever be described as failures.

Indeed, we have made substantial strides. To begin with, the ecological fragility and vulnerability of SIDS, and our inherent lack of resilience to economic volatility have become the subject of greater international recognition and study. The message has been spread and broadened beyond its original context, and now small islands and small states are coordinating across several international organisations beyond the United Nations, including the Commonwealth, the WTO, and the World Bank, to induce an effective response to our needs and concerns. An effective lobby, drawing from all corners of the SIDS has been mounted and sustained for special arrangements to be put in place to address our vulnerability, assist us to achieve sustainable development and enable us to make the transition to a globalised economy.

The Barbados Programme of Action has also become a unifying force for SIDS against the divide and conquer treatment that has historically been our lot. Our voice has grown in strength and confidence, in proportion to our determination to have that voice heard by the international community in acknowledgement of the contribution that even the small can make to the betterment of the global human condition.

Mr President, in all the circumstances, I am convinced that the Barbados Programme of Action remains relevant, valid and faithful to the core concerns of the Small Island Developing States. There is however a need to reinforce its effectiveness for modern times through the incorporation

of those new and emerging economic and social issues which have come to be recognised as obstacles to our sustainable development.

When we met in Barbados in May, 1994, the Uruguay Round had only just been completed, and the far reaching implications of the WTO arrangements on small states had not yet registered in our consciousness. Nor, perhaps, had we fully grasped the full economic implications of the pace and scope of modern technological innovation and the power of the new knowledge economy to create not only threats but also opportunities for the small but agile.

The catastrophic events of 9/11 were outside our imagination, as was the attendant diversion of resources and attention to the Anti-Terrorism Agenda that have had an enormous adverse impact on our development prospects.

The even more cataclysmic events in Asia on December 26th have in a dramatic and symbolic way captured the essence of our more difficult circumstances.

For, the reality for SIDS over the last decade has been that our vulnerability and the economic, social and environmental challenges we face in pursuit of sustainable development have not diminished but rather have intensified. The prognosis for our fragile environment has worsened with the mounting scientific evidence on climate change, climate variability and sea-level rise, and the increase in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters and other global environmental phenomena. It is all summed up in the fact that in the past year alone, the coincidence of a number of natural disasters has effectively reversed three decades of development gains in the Caribbean region, as well as in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Trade liberalization and the erosion of trade preferences have also considerably shortened the development odds for our fragile island economies. And in the face of the further dismantling of existing preferential arrangements under the agreed rules of the WTO, many SIDS face the spectre of having their options for development even more drastically reduced. It has not helped that while losing traditional markets, those newer economic sectors on which so much of our prospects rely, such as our financial services sectors, continue to be the subject of unfair attack.

Our social cohesion and economic stability have also come to be severely tested by the new approaches to migration by developed country partners and by potentially overwhelming forces such as trans-national crime, illicit drugs and HIV/AIDS.

In addition, there has been a precipitous drop in Official Development Assistance over the past decade; foreign direct investment, originally miniscule in SIDS, has all but disappeared; and resources for sustainable development activities within institutions that assist SIDS have been substantially reduced. And as more and more SIDS are "graduated" from concessional financing, they find their domestic expenditure seriously distorted by the externally imposed obligations of the new security agenda, and their economic competitiveness undermined by new trade rules.

Mr. President, the significance of Rio and Bridgetown was the recognition that the peculiar circumstances of SIDS, which are not replicated in any other group of societies, rich or poor, warrant such societies being accorded special treatment, proportional to their circumstances, in matters concerning the environment and development.

That has not changed.

Nor has the determination of the SIDS themselves to bolster their own chances of attaining sustained and sustainable development by pursuing sound macroeconomic policies, making the most creative use of their limited endowments and ensuring that their material development takes place within the context of social justice. To illustrate, my country feels that we must be especially faithful to the Plan of Action for SIDS which bears our name.

Over the past decade we have set for ourselves the goal of achieving full development, eradicating poverty, and providing gainful employment for our people. We have made substantial progress in each of these spheres.

But the progress we have achieved has sharpened our appreciation of the fact that the progress we seek, in common with all other small island developing states, can ultimately only be achieved within a propitious international environment which helps to promote, and in no way frustrate our national efforts.

Regrettably, I must assert that there is diminishing evidence of an international environment that is conducive to the development of the world's smallest and most vulnerable.

We left the 20th Century with a great sense of hope and anticipation following the articulation of an Agenda for Global Development that was ambitious in scope and deserving of the support of all.

We have proceeded into the 21st, with that Agenda for Global Development put dangerously on pause, as the attention and energies of mankind have been directed to win first and above all else the fight against terrorism, not by making the world better, but by making the clash of arms more effective.

It is time to put the Global Development Agenda, including that for the world's smallest and most vulnerable societies, back on track.

For, the success of this meeting and of the Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action will depend not only on the efforts of SIDS but also on the level of engagement of the wider international community in the process, in a heightened spirit of cooperation and partnership. As we move from Barbados to Mauritius and towards an enhanced Agenda for SIDS, we must therefore be prepared to forge deeper alliances in the common cause of our own development; and that of the global society at large.

Mr President, I am proud to be a part of that unique process which bears the name of Barbados, and which symbolises the strength of character, resilience and self-reliance of all island peoples. I am equally proud to be in this historic capital city of Port Louis to pass on to the Government and people of Mauritius the mantle of leadership for the next stage of our journey. You can be assured, Mr Prime Minister, that the bonds which the SIDS have built over the past decade will continue to be strengthened, and will be deployed without reservation in support of your leadership efforts.

We invite all members of the International Community to join with us as we embark on a new era of cooperation in addressing the sustainable development of Small Island Developing States - one of renewed responsibility, strengthened commitment, deeper partnership and more effective implementation. I thank you.