



GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

STATEMENT

**BY THE HONORABLE PRIME MINISTER
OF THE COOK ISLANDS**

HONORABLE MR. JIM MARURAI

**High Level Segment of the 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

13th January 2005

Port Louis, Mauritius

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Mr. President,
Your Excellencies,
Honorable Ministers, and
Colleagues

Kia Orana and warm greetings from the people of the Cook Islands.

First, I wish to express our deepest sympathy to the governments and peoples of the many countries which suffered overwhelming loss of life and property in the recent tsunami that ravaged countries bordering the Indian Ocean. As vulnerable island people ourselves, we are extremely saddened by the unprecedented devastation that has wrecked the idyllic shores of so many nations and we pledge our available resources and long lasting support to assist in lessening the impact of the tragedy suffered by so many people and their governments.

Mr. President

I wish to add to others that have spoken before me in congratulating you for your sterling efforts and the leadership that you have provided in the ten-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action. I would also like to congratulate the people and government of Mauritius for the excellent preparations for this International Meeting and for their gracious hospitality. This Meeting comes at a critical time to revisit and recommit ourselves to the existing and new and emerging issues of Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

We are here to engage our partners in our quest to further implement the undertakings of Barbados Programme of Action. However, I must say sadly that the political commitment and direction required for meeting the goals of sustainable development for Small Island Developing States through the Barbados Programme of Action has been mixed and fallen short of expectations. We have failed to some extent in putting our resolve into concrete actions. Nevertheless, in the case of the Cook Islands, we have made determined efforts to achieve sustainable development regardless of what have been agreed in the Barbados Programme of Action.

A recent assessment of my country's situation, confirms that the goals for sustainable development are not beyond our reach. We have made progress in the achievement of meeting the basic needs of our people through access to water and sanitation, housing and infrastructure, outer islands development, conservation of our natural resources including fisheries and forestry resources, access to energy including renewable energy, prevention of pollution and management of waste and maintaining biological diversity including related traditional knowledge.

Mr. President

The Cook Islands Government has now embarked on developing a national sustainable development plan aimed at improving economic growth that would result in a better quality of life for our people, while at the same time making concerted efforts to preserve the environment. More specifically we have recently completed a National Environment Strategic Action Framework that will guide our efforts at all levels for the next five years for implementation at all levels of the Cook Islands society. In other words we are committed to the principles of sustainable development as agreed at the World Summit of Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002.

Mr. President

As Small Island Developing States, we must remind ourselves of the key challenges and of our vision for the sustainable development. We need to embrace sustainable development with passion and commitment and develop partnership to rekindle a global spirit that will support sustainable development for SIDS. SIDS as a group of countries that are among the most vulnerable on earth, have welcomed the recognition of our special case and of the need of support from the international community. We have traveled a long journey in the last decade and we will continue to travel this journey and "walk the talk" with our development partners to make progress in furthering the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

Mr. President

For the Cook Islands, tourism remains our principal economic activity and income earner for our people. We are mindful of the constraints of tourism development, including over development, pollution, water shortages, loss of biodiversity, beach erosion and social and cultural conflicts. Hence our priority is to achieve sustainable tourism development by strengthening tourism planning, management, and international promotion through marketing. We are cognizant of an integrated approach to long-term tourism development for our country and will address environment concerns and social and economic benefits in our national sustainable development plan. We call on our partners to assist us in the mobilization of resources and technical assistance to ensure sustainable tourism practices and development for our country including the outer islands. This will also assist us in lessening the major problem of out migration to other countries.

The Pacific is a region of strong indigenous cultures and traditions and with a preponderance of customary ownership of natural resources. We, as Cook Islanders value our tradition and culture and consider this an important pillar in achieving sustainable for our people. In this regard we wish to emphasize that culture and heritage be considered as an important element for sustainable development for small island countries in this International Meeting. We need to continue to preserve our culture as well as promote culture and eco-tourism for our economic development. We are mindful

of the rapid development taking place on small islands may eventually have certain adverse effects on the natural environment, on which the human and the cultural environment is interdependent.

Mr. President

The Cook Islands like other SIDS continue to be threatened by external factors such as climate change and sea level rise. We join others to continue to encourage all Parties to ratify the UNFCCC Kyoto Protocol so that it comes into force. We congratulate Russia for ratifying the Kyoto Protocol. Its implementation is a significant first step towards achieving real and measurable reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and further commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will be required in the future. In the meantime it is critical for the international community to mobilise resources for adaptation measures and the consideration of all the implications of all adaptation needs, options and requirements for SIDS.

Mr. President

As I have stated earlier, the Cook Islands is committed to achieving our sustainable development goals and furthering the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. To this end we will provide ourselves with milestones by which to measure our progress in our national sustainable development plan. We will take home the commitments made at this meeting and our resolve to do better in the years to come in implementing the Mauritius Action Strategy for the Barbados Programme of Action. Finally, the Cook Islands will ensure that this multi-lateral process, this International Meeting, our deliberations, and the Mauritius Action Strategy will truly make a difference in bringing about sustainable development for our people and our children and for our future generations. We are more than ready to "walk the talk" with our partners.

Mr. President , I Thank you and Meitaki Maata.

13 January 2005