



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

MAURITIUS  
13 - 14 JANUARY 2005

Mr. Chairman,

We congratulate Mauritius for hosting the International Meeting on Small Island Developing States to review the Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. We express our deep appreciation to the Government and the people of Mauritius for their warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements made for the meeting. We are happy that India has made a modest contribution to the holding of the meeting through a partnership with the Government of Mauritius in the construction of this splendid Conference Centre, named after one of the universally respected saints of India. Swami Vivekananda was renowned for preaching action rather than philosophy or rituals. He had exhorted the youth of India, in the middle of the 19th century, to rise, be vigilant and not rest until attaining their goals - words which ring true even today.

If any one had doubts about the vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States and low-lying coastal areas to natural disasters and extreme weather events, if indeed anyone is still looking for evidence in this respect, the earthquake in the Aceh region of Indonesia and the ensuing tsunamis of December 26, 2004 provided such testimony in more than horrific measure. The devastation brought by these events in their wake, especially in the thickly populated areas of South and South-East Asia, was staggering. Characterised as the fourth worst disaster in more than hundred years, they led to loss of tens of thousands of lives and billions of dollars worth of property. The inherent vulnerabilities of a Small Island Developing State were brought out starkly in the case of Maldives, a neighbouring country and a Member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. We convey our condolences and sympathies to the victims and the bereaved families of those who lost their lives. The Government of India is engaged in relief efforts in areas along our own coasts. At the same time, we have been extending humanitarian relief assistance to Sri Lanka and Maldives and other countries in the region, to the maximum extent possible.

The events of December 26, 2004 are a grim reminder that the international community needs to act upon, and needs to act now, in order to assist the Small Island Developing States in dealing with their special circumstances and vulnerabilities,

including building their national capacity to deal with natural disasters and extreme weather events.

Having more than 1300 island territories has helped us familiarise ourselves with the particularities and challenges of developing small islands, while simultaneously protecting their unique environments and fragile eco-systems. It has made us fully conscious of the special needs, requirements, circumstances and vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States and we empathise with them fully.

Over the past decade, we have strengthened existing ties and established new links with the Small Island Developing States. We have opened resident Missions in many countries and established diplomatic relations with many others. We have invigorated our links with their regional organisations, with status as a full Dialogue Partner with the Pacific Islands Forum and Observer Status with the Caribbean Community.

Almost 30 small island States are now covered under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation [ITEC] programme which covers a wide variety of projects, including deputation of Indian experts, training of nationals of partner island States in premier Indian institutions and short-term study visits to India for their senior officers and decision-makers. Through the ITEC programme, India has been responding to the needs of capacity building so well articulated in the Barbados Programme of Action. Several infrastructural projects like construction of hospitals, provision of telecommunication facilities and construction of road-networks are undertaken in Small Island Developing States, under the ITEC programme. A significant percentage of Indian experts deputed abroad is working in small island States in multifarious fields including marine engineering, agriculture, geology, fisheries and medicine.

We also have much to learn from them, not least in the development of tourism sector. We have entered into agreements with some of them so as to learn from their experiences in developing tourism.

India has accumulated considerable expertise in the area of harnessing new and renewable energy sources, for more than three decade. We have developed substantial

manufacturing capacity for the design and production of equipment for the supply of non-conventional energy. We have also developed low-cost desalination plants. We stand ready to share this knowledge and experience with our partners from the small island developing countries.

Our partners in the Indian Ocean region will benefit from the connectivity mission between India and Africa announced last year. All countries of the African Union are proposed to be connected by a satellite and fibre optic network. Apart from providing effective communication and connectivity among the countries, the same link will support tele-education, tele-medicine, e-commerce, e-governance, info-tainment, resource-mapping and meteorological services. The enhanced rural connectivity will provide an effective way of harnessing technology to provide democratic access and empowerment. The seamless and integrated satellite, fibre optics and wireless network, to be provided by India at an initial cost of \$50 million, will connect 5 universities, 51 learning centres, 10 super-specialty hospitals and 53 patient-end locations in rural areas spread all over Africa. We are happy that Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros and Seychelles will be in a position to derive advantages from the proposed connectivity mission.

India's developmental experience, our commitment to growth with equality, dedication to self-reliance and deep attachment to the cause of South-South cooperation, have given us a unique inheritance, developed in the service of our people, which we wish to share with the Small Island Developing States. We re-dedicate ourselves to continue, in the spirit of South-South solidarity, to enhance our cooperation with our partners in the Small Island Developing States. Small Island developing nations can rely on India as a committed development partner.

India-Mauritius relations have been exceptionally close during the past four decades. They also provide an excellent example of South-South Cooperation, and a model for partnership with a Small Island Developing State. Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, President of the Indian National Congress, inaugurated last month the National Science Centre named after late Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India, which India had been privileged to help in establishing in Mauritius. We have also launched an ambitious programme for

collaboration in Information and Communication Technologies, apart from maintaining our contributions in the areas of secondary and higher education. We trust that Mauritius will soon develop as a hub in attracting students not only from neighbouring countries but from other parts of Africa as new centres of excellence in education are developed here.

One of the main themes at the recently concluded 10th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC] was that of adaptation. It may be recalled that the 8th Conference of Parties held in New Delhi in October, 2002 had adopted a Declaration on adaptation. The Convention contains valuable provisions for addressing the vulnerabilities of Small island Developing States and for assisting them in their efforts to cope with the challenge of adaptation to climate change and sea-level rise. The Mauritius meeting will explore different modalities for assisting Small Island Developing States in the area of adaptation to climate change.

India stands ready to share its experience, expertise, intellectual, technological and physical resources to contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for the economic prosperity and sustainable development of SIDS. With this objective as a policy priority, India has committed concessional loans and credit lines amounting to US\$ 350 million and a further US\$ 70 million as project aid for SIDS member States.

Contributions of a fellow developing country like India to the development of small island developing nations and to the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action is intended to supplement the efforts required from the international community. It is equally essential that those more fortunate than us shoulder their responsibilities for the provision of adequate assistance, including financial resources, technology transfer and capacity-building, to the small Island developing nations. They also need to address urgently other aspects related to the special vulnerabilities of these States. Our common interest in security, peace and development would admit of nothing less.

I wish the deliberations all success. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.