

International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Barbados
Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island
Developing States

Mauritius, 10-14 January 2004

Statement by Minister of State Lenihan at the General Debate

Mr President

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

I would like to first of all fully align myself with the statement delivered by my Luxembourg colleague on behalf of the European Union.

I would like to also express the appreciation of my delegation for all of the wonderful hospitality offered by the Government of Mauritius and to emphasise the importance we attach to a successful outcome from this meeting.

I will not repeat the points already made by my colleague from Luxembourg. I will instead make some brief remarks on one or two issues that are of particular concern.

At the outset however, let me offer the sincere sympathy of my country to those of you who have suffered such a huge and tragic loss following the recent earthquake in Asia and subsequent tsunami. This is a disaster that does not recognise any geographic borders and one which has had a truly global impact. The shocking and horrific images following the Indian Ocean tsunami that we all saw on our screens were unprecedented and have prompted a response from the international community that has also been unprecedented. Some 60 nations will contribute to relief efforts.

My Government has already pledged a contribution of €10 million to support relief efforts - a contribution that has been matched by the generous contributions from Irish public.

I sincerely hope that this outpouring of generosity and support will continue to characterise the future response of the international community to such human tragedies.

Over ten years ago the international community met in Barbados to consider how we could support the small island developing states — the so called SIDS - to achieve their own sustainable development. This week we are again gathered in another beautiful island — Mauritius — to

review progress since Barbados and to consider how best we can support the SIDS in meeting new development challenges and indeed in taking advantage of the new development opportunities they now face.

The world has moved on since Barbados. Ireland like our partners in the European Union has adopted the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals as a central guiding orientation for its development policy. We believe that there must be an integrated approach to the implementation of all of the recent global conference outcomes – LDC III, Monterrey, and Johannesburg - within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals. We believe that Mauritius 2004 can be an essential part of that approach and that our work here this week will be a critical contribution for the 2005 review of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

We would like to see this Meeting focussing on the special needs of the SIDS as called for at the United Nations Millennium Summit, when world leaders resolved to address the special needs faced by Small Island Developing States "rapidly and in full" by 2015.

SIDS have long been recognised as being on the front line in terms of environmental disasters whether naturally occurring or exacerbated by climate change. As stated in the Barbados Programme of Action, Small Island Developing States are particularly vulnerable to global climate change, climate variability and sea level rise.

The vulnerability of small island nations gained attention not only around recent events in Asia but also last year, after hurricanes and major storms devastated Haiti, Grenada and others in the Caribbean region, as well as other island countries in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

The SIDs themselves are all located in the regions of the world that are most vulnerable to natural disasters such as the tsunamis. Maldives has been badly hit by the recent catastrophe. Mauritius has not escaped undamaged.

It is particularly appropriate therefore that we are all gathered here in Mauritius this week to consider how best the international community can help the SIDs can build up their resilience to cope with these challenges and enable them to achieve sustainable development.

The international community should now examine the work on Vulnerability Indices and their potential use as valuable tools to deal with the particular issues SIDS are facing.

While economic, social, and environmental vulnerability are not exclusive to SIDS, vulnerability indices can be used in assessing the

specific needs of SIDS in the framework of existing instruments and policies which may require tailored approaches

In this context I would like to again stress the importance of programmes and measures drawn up in close partnership with the vulnerable states themselves aimed at increasing the resilience of the SIDS by building their capacity to react and adapt to economic, social and environmental shocks and trends that are beyond the control of SIDS themselves.

Ireland has been a long time supporter of the important work on a global Environmental Vulnerability Index carried out through our partnership with the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC). I was delighted to have the opportunity to participate at the formal launch of the EVI yesterday.

Finally, I would like to emphasise the importance of this meeting producing an outcome that has a real added-value for the SIDs. In an increasingly globalized world, we have ample experience of not only our inter-dependence and our common vulnerabilities but also of the importance of a collective response. We have the opportunity to exercise our common responsibility in support of the SIDs this week. Let us all seize this opportunity to make a real difference.

Thank you