

PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT TO THE
INTERNATIONAL MEETING TO REVIEW THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION
FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL
ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES
PORT LOUIS, MAURITIUS, 10-14 JANUARY 2005

Mr./Madam Chairman

Your Excellencies Mr. Anwarul Chowdhury, Secretary General of this International Meeting; Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations; The Right Honourable Sir Anerood Jugnauth, President of the Republic of Mauritius; The Honourable Paul Raymond Berenger, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius; Heads of States and Governments of Small Island Developing States, Heads of UN Agencies and other Intergovernmental Bodies, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would first like to say on behalf of my delegation and myself, how delighted we are to be here, and to thank the Government and people of Mauritius for hosting this meeting and for their kindness and wonderful hospitality, which we have been privileged to experience over the past few

days. I would also like to convey through you, on behalf of the people of St. Kitts and Nevis, our heart-felt appreciation to the United Nations and its various organs, in particular the SIDS Unit of UNDESA, both for the timely organization of this International Meeting and for the assistance to prepare for the meeting, given to Small Island States like my own, St. Kitts and Nevis.

Mr. Chairman,

At this point, I too, on behalf of my delegation and the people of my Country, would like to express my profound sadness and heartfelt sympathy for all those who have lost family and friends and had their lives, environment and livelihoods shattered by the terrible earthquakes and sunamies that have devastated the coastal areas and islands of the Indian Ocean - among them our sister islands of the Maldives and the Seychelles.

Mr. Chair man,

These events have further underscored the vulnerability of Small Island Developing States to these types of disasters and the need to make every effort to mitigate their impacts. I believe that in this context and as a result of this disaster, it is appropriate for this meeting to call for sunami monitoring systems (as currently obtains in the Pacific), to provide the

warning that could save the lives of those living on small islands and threatened coastal zones not only in the Indian Ocean but also in the Atlantic and the Caribbean which are also regions whose populations are concentrated along the coasts, and live in constant jeopardy of undersea volcanic eruptions and earthquakes.

Mr. Chairman,

In Barbados in 1994 at the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, we all subscribed to a Programme of Action that we believed would transform the future for SIDS by increasing their resilience in the face of the vulnerabilities that are intrinsic to them as small open, dependent, island economies prone to devastating natural disasters. The SIDS Programme of Action was put together against the background of increasing scientific knowledge and evidence that the earth's environment was being critically degraded by man's economic activity and that this degradation if not halted, could have serious consequences for mankind.

Small Island Developing States were among the first to recognise the importance of these developments because we were aware that we would be

among the first to be negatively impacted by both climate change and the over exploitation of our fragile island ecosystems. With such a powerful awakening, we were also the first to draw attention to the fact that these environmental impacts compromised our ability to achieve sustainable development, because the environment is the basis of our economic and social development and is the context within which our rich humanistic cultures were formed and exist.

Mr. Chairman,

That is why as early as 1987, just four years after gaining political independence, and five years before the Earth Summit, St. Kitts and Nevis enacted **The National Conservation and Environmental Protection Act**, a comprehensive piece of legislation designed to integrate the protection and management of our natural resources into the development strategy of the Country. The programmes of action emanating from The Earth Summit in 1992 (Agenda 21) and the succeeding United Nations Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in Barbados in 1994, thus served to strengthen our resolve and to amplify and support our existing national framework for sustainable development.

There have been several subsequent initiatives designed to embed sustainable development into the strategic planning processes of our Country. The major ones include the establishment of a **National Conservation Commission** to manage the implementation of the 1987 Act, and the preparation of a **National Environmental Action Plan** to identify the major environmental issues facing the community and ensure that appropriate policies and actions are formulated and implemented.

The integration of these initiatives into the national **Medium Term Economic Strategy** has brought environmental concerns into the mainstream and made it more likely that economic development would proceed in balance with both the environment and human and social development. Recently, in order to further promote mainstreaming and give institutional validity to our sustainable development aspirations, we have established a centrally located Ministry of Sustainable Development as part of the Ministry of Finance and Technology and directly responsible to the Prime Minister. This is again to signal our determination to achieve complete consistency between our social, economic and environmental goals.

In St. Kitts and Nevis we have also been very mindful of our responsibilities to the international community and the need to support the creation of global environmental goods. As a consequence, we are party to a number of international treaties and have prepared several national strategies and action plans. The most recent of these are our Initial National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. Regionally, we are involved in disaster mitigation and management initiatives and in projects to protect our coastal aquifers and preserve the integrity of the surrounding seas on which we depend for our very life. We, together with others in our Caribbean family are also seeking to replace the expensive fossil fuels that are so ruinous to the environment with cheaper, more environmentally benign, renewable energy. These are just a few of the concerns that St. Kitts and Nevis along with other SIDS has tried to advance on our own behalf with regard to the 1994 Programme of Action.

Friends and partners in the international community have assisted us in some of these endeavours. Indeed much of the funding for the research, investigations and consultations required to prepare these formative plans have been provided through the Global Environment Facility and we are

grateful for the assistance. But we are only just at the beginning of the road to a sustainable future and much still remains to be done. Over the past ten years we have discovered just how dynamic a concept sustainable development is. It is like those theories of the universe that explain the origins of everything. Thus all elements of the economic, social, and environmental development paradigm in different permutations and combinations can advance or retard sustainability and sometimes in ways that are difficult to predict.

Mr. Chairman,

The last ten years have presented new challenges to our sustainable development that were either not fully understood or seemed inconceivable in 1994. The HIV/AIDS pandemic, for example, demonstrates not so much the extent to which the world has changed in the past ten years, but how great a shift there has been and must continue to be in the level of awareness about the threat that HIV/AIDS poses for sustainable human development in SIDS in order to halt the spread of this dangerous plague. The 1994 Programme of Action barely mentioned HIV/AIDS; today its control and prevention must be at the top of our human development agenda if we are to have any possibility of achieving sustainable development.

In the current phase of globalisation, Small Island Developing States like mine have had to compete in a marketplace where the odds seem to be heavily stacked against us. Already disadvantaged by small size and a disaster prone, fragile, insular environment, we have had to confront the additional hurdles of rising indebtedness, unstable commodity prices, reduced market access, and an increasingly insecure world. Over the past ten years we have had to fight to achieve growth and some measure of lasting development in the face of numerous setbacks. One example that comes to mind is the series of destructive hurricanes that wreaked havoc on the economic and social infrastructure of my own Country of St. Kitts and Nevis from the mid 1990s onward. Today we are still struggling to repay the debts that were accumulated in dealing with the aftermath.

Mr. Chairman,

It is within the context of these scenarios, that I would like to stress the importance of this Review of the Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. It provides us with the opportunity to revisit those issues that we underestimated in 1994 such as HIV/AIDS, and to confront new challenges such as growing indebtedness and increasing world insecurity. Most importantly, it allows us to recommit to a revised programme that fully

reflects the changes that have occurred over the past ten years while providing a vision of what is possible in a twenty-first century of unimaginable technological advancement.

We will need help in mounting such a programme. For this purpose we must forge true bilateral and multilateral partnerships with unambiguous commitments. We believe genuine partnership among all our countries – developed and developing – as well as regional and international organizations and institutions, is vital to achieving sustainable development in Small Island Developing States.

Mr. Chairman,

We are conscious of the fact that many of the promises that were made in Barbados in 1994 remain unfulfilled. Small Island Developing States, however, have not sat on their hands they have been proactive in the implementation of programmes to improve the economic and social conditions of their people, even if the result, as in the case of my own Country, is to be penalised by the graduation policy of international financial organisations.

Our international partners, particularly developed countries can support the efforts of Small Island Developing States by firstly meeting the development and environmental targets laid down in the various international conventions and treaties to halt the progress of climate change and biodiversity loss, for this in the end will determine whether Small Island Developing States actually survive into the next century. We need support in the form of additional resources to assist us in coping with the impact of those events over which we have no control. The use of vulnerability indices, to supplement crude statistical averages like per capita income in assessments, would be a good start. We also need more recognition of a shared responsibility for debt reduction, international security and HIV/AIDS. Sharing the fruits of technology more evenly through real technology transfer is another key commitment that would transform the lives of millions in SIDS.

Mr. Chairman,

In closing, I once again call on our development partners and indeed the world community to take seriously the aspirations of the peoples living in the threatened coastal zones of small islands and to consider any support given to SIDS a worthwhile investment in our collective future - if only

because the future that we face today may very well be that of the rest of the world tomorrow.