

**Statement by Honourable Paul Raymond Bérenger, GCSK,
Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius at the High-Level
Segment of the UN International Meeting on SIDS
13 January 2005**

Thank you Rt Honourable Owen Arthur,

Mauritius is indeed honoured to accept the custodianship of the SIDS process and hereby solemnly commits itself to uphold, defend and promote on all occasions the interests of Small Island Developing States. We are most grateful to the Government and People of Barbados for their outstanding stewardship during the past ten years.

Your Excellency, Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the UN,

Excellence Monsieur Jean Ping, Président de la 59^{ème} Session de l'Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies,

Excellencies Heads of State & Government,

Your Excellency, Mr. Anwarul Chowdhury, UN High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and Secretary General of this Meeting,

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies Heads of Delegation,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome all of you to the High Level Segment of this International Meeting. I would like to extend a very special welcome to the Secretary General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, who has honoured us with his distinguished presence today.

Excellencies,

The Small Island Developing States are at a crossroad. In 1994, 111 countries met in Barbados to adopt a Programme of Action mapping a path for their sustainable development based on the premise that because of their inherent vulnerabilities, SIDS represented a special case for environment and sustainable development. The Programme was hailed as a major achievement. Today, more than ten years later, as we meet to review its implementation, we find that the progress made can at best be described as mixed. In fact, in the majority of the SIDS, the results have been unsatisfactory, and those who have been able to do better have generally done so through their own efforts. This failure can be attributed to several factors, the most important one being the absence of resources as promised by the international community. To further complicate matters, new and emerging issues, such as globalization, HIV/AIDS and security concerns have accentuated the inability of these countries to implement the agreed Programme.

The unprecedented December 26th 2004 earthquake and the associated tsunami in the Indian Ocean and the recent hurricane seasons in the Caribbean and Pacific regions provide us with a most sobering opportunity to reflect anew on the vulnerability of SIDS, and the reality is that this vulnerability continues to grow.

It is within this context of this overall vulnerability that I invite you to reflect on some fundamental realities of the past several decades during which period most SIDS have gained independence.

During the United Nations Development Decade of the 60s, the newly independent SIDS were urged to seek capital for investment, but they met with little success. In the 1970s, many SIDS attempted to build new institutions and international relations, but their efforts were stifled in a world that did not encourage diversity in development strategies. During the 80s, many SIDS and developing countries in general were required to undertake structural adjustment programmes that reversed many of the progressive social policy initiatives that had been necessitated by years of historical neglect. In the 90s, the Washington consensus called for private-sector led export promotion but the liberalization of international trade regimes eroded the traditional preferential access to markets enjoyed by SIDS. This advice, though logical, remains difficult to implement. Not only has market access become more difficult, the investment required for diversification and for new industries to support the economic growth of SIDS has equally not materialized.

None of these nostrums actually worked to full satisfaction.

At the start of the new Millennium, the Small Island Developing States joined the international community in adopting the Millennium Development Goals to add to the already agreed international development goals and targets. This was followed two years later by further commitments at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

These goals are consistent with the Barbados Programme of Action that was agreed to in 1994 and they further reinforce them. It is to be feared, however, that unless concrete measures are taken within an appropriate enabling environment, in respect of access and mobilization of resources, access to technology and capacity building, the full and effective implementation of the BPOA and the achievement of the targets will continue to be elusive.

The decrease in Overseas Development Assistance by about 50% over the last 10 years and scarce resources within SIDS have considerably limited their development. Isolation, small domestic market size, and poor resilience to external shocks compounded by extreme exposure to natural calamities, global environmental problems such as climate change, sea-level rise, ozone depletion and deforestation significantly hamper their development efforts.

In an attempt to generate income and create employment and economic growth, SIDS have often had to resort to overexploitation of their natural resources and this has led to environmental degradation compromising in some cases the scope for sustainable development. While it is imperative for SIDS to improve current socio-economic conditions, this should be done without further damage to key ecosystems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Historically, SIDS have been traditional suppliers of goods and commodities to past colonial powers under preferential trade arrangements which could actually be described as “supply arrangements” rather than trading arrangements. These arrangements continued after political independence and represented an important source of revenue for them while at the same time causing a fair amount of dependency.

Since Barbados, a new trade regime has further complicated the global environment in which SIDS have to operate.

Many SIDS are unable to face merciless competition and encounter much difficulty in undergoing the painful adjustment process called for. In spite of all their strenuous efforts to withstand global competition, they run the risk of further marginalization. Unless they are given the necessary support and policy space at this critical

junction, it would be impossible for them to achieve the goals of sustainable development.

Excellencies,

The truth is that without renewed International support, SIDS will continue to face an uncertain future with very little possibility of meeting the Millennium Development Goals and consolidating social and economic gains.

No doubt, we have to continue with our sustained national efforts for our economic growth and social and environmental development. But this is not enough. The International Community must support SIDS in the creation of an enabling environment to facilitate trade, investment, capacity and resilience building and preparedness to face natural calamities and other disasters.

In parallel, more emphasis needs to be placed on regional cooperation and SIDS – SIDS partnership for it is clear that a number of problems can be more effectively addressed through regional and cross border initiatives.

A major challenge for SIDS in resilience – building is to have a new mindset towards energy policy. Energy shocks are among the most frequent and disruptive external factors experienced by SIDS. Heavy reliance of SIDS on imports of energy gives rise to substantial

foreign exchange outflows. The volatile nature of the global energy market in relatively short periods is responsible for derailing economic growth and fueling inflation in many SIDS. Yet, it has been established that SIDS have great endowment of renewable energy resources from the sun and the oceans. SIDS, therefore, have a double vested interest in developing these sources of energy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While the Exclusive Economic Zones of SIDS are host to over 80% of the world's bio-diversity, SIDS have very little control over that space. Illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing activities are taking place in SIDS EEZs mostly due to their lack of surveillance capability. SIDS therefore urgently require assistance and provisions of Vessel Monitoring Surveillance Systems as well as technical training to be able to fully and sustainably manage their marine resources.

At the level of the World Trade Organisation, special efforts must be made to enable SIDS to better integrate into the new multilateral trading system. Side by side with secure, predictable and preferential market access, there is the urgent need to build the supply-side capacity of SIDS. These warrant enabling international rules to compensate for their inherent weaknesses, structural handicaps and severe vulnerabilities. Thus, the ongoing negotiations

of the Doha Round must come up with solutions to respond to the trade-related problems of SIDS.

All these initiatives should enhance the resilience of SIDS. However, it is a must for all SIDS to speak with one voice to ensure that their concerns are fully taken on board in all international fora . Simultaneously, the UN reform process should provide for a monitoring mechanism which would ensure the effective implementation of the programme of action. To this effect, clear mandates should be given to all Specialised Agencies, Organisations and bodies of the UN system, Funds and Programmes to regularly monitor the implementation of the outcomes of this International Meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The tsunami aftermath compels us to think anew of early warning systems in all regions of the world. So far, we have focused on preparedness at national level for disaster management. Now we have no choice but to go for regional and even global initiatives. In this regard, priority of consideration should be given to the setting up of a Special Trust Fund to operate Early Warning Systems and develop disaster preparedness. It is equally important to invest in Disaster Reduction through education, information dissemination and awareness creation.

Finally, I would wish to record that the themes for the two round table discussions, namely, “Mobilizing Resources for BPOA Implementation” and “Building Capacity in SIDS” provided in the meeting have been well thought of. I rejoice at the fact that we, at the level of Heads of States and Governments, are discussing both the way forward and implementation issues. This shows firm commitment at the highest level of the International Community.

Let me reiterate here my earnest wish to see concrete and realistic actions emanating from this International Meeting and the full and effective implementation of such actions will need to receive the same commitment from our development partners, the Private Sector, NGO’s and Civil Society.

Excellencies,

This year promises to be a very important year for the UN and multilateralism. Next week’s meeting in Kobe will be critical for the international strategy for Disaster Preparedness. Then the high level panel report on Threat, challenges and Change is expected to lead to some very important outcome at the Special Summit to be held in September. Let it also be the year for the Sustainable Development of SIDS and in this regard, it is imperative that SIDS specific issues do find their rightful place in the outcome of the Kobe Meeting and the Special Summit.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Yes, indeed, the Small Island Developing States are at a crossroad and this is truly a defining moment for their future.

Nous, Chefs d'Etat et de Gouvernement, ministres et chefs de délégation, ici présents, tenons en vérité entre nos mains, en ce jour et demain, l'avenir même des Petits Etats Insulaires en Développement.

Qu'il me soit permis de le répéter, nous n'avons pas droit à l'erreur, et les générations à venir ne nous le pardonneraient pas si nous laissions s'échapper un succès tant mérité qui est à notre portée en ce moment historique.

The Small Island Developing States and their development partners have worked hard, very hard for what we can and must achieve today and tomorrow here in Mauritius.

We deserve and have a duty to succeed, and we shall.

I thank you for your kind attention.