

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**ADDRESS TO THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING  
FOR THE 10-YEAR REVIEW  
OF THE BARBADOS PROGRAMME OF ACTION  
FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES  
Port Louis, 13 January 2005**

Prime Minister,  
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,  
Excellencies,  
Mr. Chowdhury,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank Prime Minister Bérenger and the people of Mauritius for the great skill with which they have prepared and hosted this meeting, which has taken on even greater relevance in the wake of the tsunami that struck the region with such fury just 18 days ago.

With the exception of storm surges not far from this capital, Mauritius was spared the destructive force of the tsunamis. Too many other men, women and children, from Asia to Africa, were not so fortunate.

I have just visited some of the places that were hit the hardest. I have seen some of the terrible destruction – vast, lifeless swathes where once there were vibrant communities. I have met with displaced families, and listened to stories of unimaginable sadness. And I have seen relief workers on the move night and day to deliver aid.

What I witnessed was just a tiny sampling of what took place. Such suffering, such devastation, is shocking in both its magnitude and the speed with which it occurred. We human beings have been humbled yet again by the power of nature to alter, in an instant, our lives and the very face of the earth. But my time in the region also showed me something else that nature cannot extinguish: the human will, in this case the determination to rebuild and, most inspiring of all, to join together in that effort.

Let us declare our enduring solidarity with the survivors. The outpouring of assistance has come from everywhere, including countries with limited means or struggling through crises of their own. The United Nations will continue to do its part, sparing no effort to ensure that help reaches those who need it, quickly and effectively. That means now, in the emergency phase, to provide clean water, sanitation, food and medical care. And it means over the long-term, as we look to reconstruction and long-term development. Should disaster strike again, and it will, in some part of the world, we must be able to say that we did everything humanly possible to build resilient societies.

This tragedy has taught us once again the need for prevention and early warning. Last week's meeting in Jakarta called for the establishment of a regional early warning system for the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. But we should do even more. We need a global warning system – and one that covers not just tsunamis but all other threats, such as storm surges and cyclones. In such an endeavour, no part of the world should be ignored. We must think globally, and consider measures equal to the task.

We must also be ready to take decisive measures to address climate change. It is no longer so hard to imagine what might happen from the rising sea levels that the world's top scientists are telling us will accompany global warming. Who can claim that we are doing enough?

Excellencies,

The events of the past 18 days have also cast into sharp relief other issues facing the world's small-island developing states.

Small island nations are a diverse group. But they face common threats, not just climate change and a unique vulnerability to natural disasters, but also degradation of key ecosystems such as coral reefs and mangroves, which also suffered grievously from the tsunami. They face built-in constraints such as small economies, and limited freshwater, land and other natural resources. Waste disposal is a growing problem. Energy costs are high, meaning that more must be done to promote renewable sources. And they are handicapped by the protectionism of other countries, both developed and developing. Barely above sea level, remote from world markets, many small island states occupy the margins of our global community. For some, their very existence is in jeopardy.

United Nations conferences from Rio to Johannesburg and Monterrey, and above all ten years ago in Barbados, have sought to rally the world behind the cause of small island developing states. There has been progress. Some small islands have carved out new market niches, in particular in services such as finance, tourism and information technologies. The latter in particular have helped to ease their isolation.

But major economic challenges remain. On the whole, implementation of what was agreed and promised at Barbados remains disappointing at best. And in the meantime, new challenges have emerged. The AIDS epidemic has made deep inroads, especially in the Caribbean, which now ranks second to sub-Saharan Africa in the proportion of its adult population infected.

So what was, a decade ago, an already pressing small islands agenda, has become even more urgent and daunting. Good progress is possible here in Mauritius. Partnerships with regional organizations and civil society will be crucial. The private sector's involvement is essential. The United Nations system will continue to do its part, including through advocacy aimed at keeping the issues of concern to small islands prominent on the international agenda.

I am encouraged that so many leaders have attended, and that this high-level segment is focusing so intently on implementation. That should enable you to come out of here with a strong political consensus and a plan that can be implemented. Perhaps most crucially, we must recognize that what happens in small island developing states concerns us all.

Excellencies,

That very interconnectedness -- of states, of threats, of development and security -- is one of the key messages of the report issued last month by the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. I want to say a few words about the Panel's report, because it is central to the development agenda.

The Panel has put forth a new and comprehensive vision of collective security that places great emphasis on prevention, and on building up the capacities of states to address threats and fulfil their responsibilities. The Panel has stated clearly that addressing development challenges such as extreme poverty, climate change and the spread of infectious diseases such as AIDS and malaria is indispensable for our collective security. It has stressed the devastating impact that terrorism, conflict and organized crime have on development. And it has given us both wide-ranging policy recommendations and suggestions for significant changes in our multilateral institutions, including the United Nations.

The burden now falls on Member States to take up the challenge of change. Four days from now brings another landmark on the way to September's Summit meeting: the report of the Millennium Project. That report will describe how the MDGs can be met by the target date of 2015. But it will take more than business as usual. Indeed, it will emphasize the need for a major worldwide scaling-up of investments. And it will call for wide-ranging country-level and international actions on aid, debt relief, trade and science and technology.

I shall draw on both reports for the preparation of my own report, to be issued in March, on all aspects of the Millennium Declaration. With these documents in hand, and with your discussions well advanced, September should be a time for far-reaching decisions on our common future.

Excellencies,

We are all inhabitants of the global island. All of us, rich and poor, weak and strong, whether citizens of great power or tiny atoll, are linked in webs of opportunity and vulnerability.

We should have known this already, but it has taken a tsunami to press the point home. The question now is whether we will act over the long term, not just in small islands but everywhere, in the same spirit of unity that characterizes the current moment.

If any good should come from the upheaval caused by the tsunami, I hope it will be to have proven, once and for all, the need to heed the warning signs, come together well in advance of calamity, and sustain a collective effort to end human misery and build strong foundations for development and peace.

I wish you every success for this meeting. And I look forward to working with you to ease today's suffering, and to make the most of the unique opportunity that awaits us in the year ahead.

Thank you very much.