



# REPUBLIC OF SEYCHELLES

STATEMENT  
BY  
PIKESIDENT JAMES A. MICHEL  
AT THE  
INTERNATIONAL MEETING  
TO REVIEW TIDE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF  
SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

LES PAILLES, MAURITIUS

13<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2005

Your Excellency Mr. Paul Berenger, Prime Minister of Mauritius,  
Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,  
Your Excellency Mr Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations.  
Honourable Ministers,  
Distinguished Representatives of International Organisations and  
Non-Governmental Organisations,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is of significant importance that we meet in the Indian Ocean, ten years after the Global Conference on Sustainable Development in Small Island Developing States was held in Barbados.

I would like, Prime Minister Berenger, to thank and congratulate you, your eminent and the people of Mauritius for hosting this conference and putting our region on the map in such a timely and pertinent way. Thank you also for your gracious hospitality.

Ten years ago, in the wake of the Rio Summit, and based on Agenda 21, we agreed on a common approach and a series of specific actions and measures - at the national, regional and international levels - to enhance the sustainable development of small island developing states.

We are now going through a comprehensive review of the Barbados Program of Action.

One of our main tasks is to overcome two obstacles.

The first one often takes the form of time-consuming debates on matters that fall within the province of terminology and semantics.

We have agreed on the basic concept of SIDS, and we share today - much more than ever before — an acute vulnerability to environmental threats as well as to certain socio-economic factors.

We must avoid a loss of momentum due to confusion which might be engendered by too much rhetoric about and around this concept. To put it bluntly, there should be less talk and more action!

The second obstacle is the temptation to renegotiate what was previously agreed.

What is important today is to concentrate on what remains essential, based on our performance in implementing the Barbados Program of Action.

It is a question of not just renewing commitments but of honouring them and securing further commitments for the future.

Mr. Chairman.

In this context, one of our main concerns is the global decline in Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) and the accompanying marginalization of some SIDS on the basis of the GDP per capita criterion.

Countries like Seychelles are victims of their success and trapped in situations where most indicators used fail to capture the very specific nature of their constraints, needs and efforts.

The sole consideration of GDP per capita does not do justice to the enormous investments in human welfare, social infrastructure, and opportunity costs in environment protection and conservation.

There is a need for a new approach, one which takes into consideration a more realistic eligibility criterion in the attribution of development assistance. We have been advocating for many years for the adoption of a "vulnerability index" as a fairer and more comprehensive set of criteria. A few encouraging steps have been taken in that direction, most notably by the United Nations, the World Bank and the Commonwealth, but we still have a long way to go before workable mechanisms are put in place.

I remain hopeful, though, that with the collective efforts of SIDS — as one single entity, under the aegis of AOSIS — progress will be made.

Mr. Chairman.

We meet at a time of great tribulation and adversity. The recent massive earthquake in Sumatra and the ensuing *tsumami* have caused great human suffering and destruction of property and infrastructure on an unimaginable scale in our region.

The victims of this calamity remain in our thoughts. The international community must spare no effort in alleviating their immediate suffering and distress. But we must also think of the future, think of re-construction so that people can get on with their lives, and think of preventing such disasters — at least on the human level — and mitigating their effects.

In Seychelles we have been spared the worst in terms of human life. "Two persons died as a result of the *tsumami*. But there has been widespread damage to infrastructure, public utilities and private property. Many people have lost their homes and livelihoods.

The extent of the damage has been preliminarily estimated at over US\$ 30 million. This may seem small compared to the damage inflicted on our neighbours, but it is nonetheless considerable for a small economy like ours.

We will need to rebuild and reconstruct so as not to reverse past gains. Indeed, we have already started work on this, but there is an urgent need for the international community to complement our own efforts.

This unprecedented calamity in our region has taught us, in the most compelling terms, that there is an urgent need for an early warning system in the Indian Ocean region, similar to that which exists in the Pacific. Many lives would have been spared had there been one. And many others would have been saved had there been an appropriate disaster response mechanism.

Secondly, there is a need for the setting up of a special disaster fund to help the long term recovery of small island and coastal states in our region from such natural calamities. Expressions of solidarity and pledges of financial support are welcome in our moment of need, but unless these are translated into concrete action and in real terms, human suffering will continue and be exacerbated in the aftermath of natural disasters.

Mr. Chairman,

For the past two decades and more, Seychelles has moved ahead on the path of sustainable development. We made remarkable progress, which is reflected in our *National Development Strategy* - to be circulated during this conference.

In spite of all these efforts and initiatives, one reality subsists: sustainable development in a globalised world is soon going to be out of reach for us and for most SIDS if our partners in development, and the international community at large, continue to support us half-heartedly.

Ten years after we met in Barbados, the time has come for us to build new resource mobilization mechanisms to help us to become more self-reliant.

This is why we came here, to Mauritius, with so much enthusiasm, hope and determination. Our goal is an ambitious one and together we can achieve it.

In closing I wish to emphasize the need for an effective and workable monitoring and review process of the Mauritius Outcome. I would urge the UN Secretary General to consider expanding and strengthening the capacity of the SIDS Unit at the UN Secretariat to continue to address the issues I have raised and propose that the three intergovernmental regional organizations - CARICOM, Pacific Islands Forum and the Indian Ocean Commission - be also further strengthened to play a greater role in the implementation mechanism.

I thank you for your attention.