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Statement by

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Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment

Of the

Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

In the General Debate of the High-Level Segment

Of the

International Meeting to Review Implementation

Of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development

Of Small Island Developing States

Port Louis, Mauritius, 13-14 January 2005.

Mr, Chairman,

It is my pleasure to extend to you and to the Government and People of Mauritius, the heartfelt appreciation of the delegation of Trinidad and Tobago for the warmth and hospitality extended to us since our arrival in your beautiful country.

We are gathered here in Mauritius in this newly-constructed and modern Swami Vivekananda Conference Centre, in the aftermath of the worst single natural disaster in recent history. The effects of the devastation on the affected countries of South and Southeast Asia will continue to be felt long after infrastructure has been repaired and some modicum of normalcy restored.

On behalf of the Government and People of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, my delegation wishes to convey to the Governments and Peoples of those countries affected, and particularly to the bereaved families, our deepest condolences. I assure you, Mr. Chairman, of Trinidad and Tobago's steadfast commitment to assist in the rehabilitation of these countries within the limits of its resources.

Mr. Chairman, it borders on the surreal that we meet in the wake of such tragic events to review implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA), which has among its core concerns, the lack of resilience of Small Island-Developing States (SIDS) to natural disasters.

Through this single calamitous event, the global spotlight has been cast on the immediacy and fury of these naturally occurring phenomena.

Additional human lives will have been lost, even more extensive material damage suffered and effective response actions stymied, in large measure due to the constraints faced by these countries, constraints similar to those that have featured in our deliberations here in Port Louis. Not unlike the affected countries, SIDS live with the prospect of the occurrence of such disasters, not as discreet events, but each and every year without fail, several times a year. The difference from year to year in the effects of their rampage through our regions is one only of degree. It is instructive that the resources necessary for effective recovery must be diverted from capital development and social programmes of affected countries, setting them back several years.

Mr. Chairman, these constraints notwithstanding, assessments of the performance of SIDS in the implementation of the BPoA reveal among other things, two (2) major findings. The first is that much of the progress made by these countries in implementing the recommendations of the Programme, has been in large measure as a result of their own efforts. Secondly, those results have been mixed across regions and sub-regions, and from country to country. The gains that have been made towards achieving the targets of the original Programme of Action, have to a considerable extent been stunted by the emergence of new challenges in such areas as trade,

the transmission of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and security issues. In addressing all these concerns, we have become painfully aware of the need to augment and enhance the capacity of our human and institutional resources.

In this regard, Trinidad and Tobago is fully supportive of the SIDS University Consortium which is to be launched on the occasion of this Meeting, as being a shining example of South-South cooperation, and which is fully consistent with capacity development initiatives being pursued at the national level.

We are thankful that commitments made by development partners in the international community have to some extent been forthcoming. However, much more needs to be done. The basis for the sustained effort required, continues to be the recognition that SIDS constitute a category of countries that face peculiar challenges which make them worthy of "special" attention. This perspective should inform the systemic responses to these challenges in a structured and sustained way. SIDS have played, and will continue to play their part in the process, but the support of the international community must be forthcoming, not as a favour to them, but in fulfillment of commitments made. Additionally, SIDS require that the support of their development partners not be limited to this forum, but be manifested as well in their positions on the treatment of issues which impinge on the process in other forums.

Mr. Chairman, in the emerging debate on the contents of the Report of the United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, there are two (2) themes which are particularly prominent. The first is the interconnectedness of today's world, with shared vulnerabilities and threats. The second is the central role of sustainable human development in confronting those threats.

The challenge for the recommendations of the Report will lie in their ability to accommodate nuances in the perceptions of what should constitute priorities for concerted international action, and how resources should be disbursed in support of those actions.

Events in the international arena continue to remind us of the need for a unified approach in optimizing the use of those resources by streamlining the inputs of all stakeholders in a coherent and coordinated manner.

It is in this context, Mr. Chairman that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago submits, that if we are to guarantee the success of the actions determined here, we must embark on the task at hand with a commitment to real partnership. Our approach must be inclusive, taking on board all sectors of our societies, particularly civil society, academia, women and the youth. We must ensure as well that our initiatives target rural communities. Then and only then can we be assured of securing the outcomes that will make our efforts worthwhile.

Mr. Chairman, I consider germane the following submission from William Shakespeare, who reminds us that, and I quote "All the world is a stage, and all men and women on it are merely players. They have their entrances and exits, and each in turn plays different parts"[Unquote]. We here today have our parts to play on this important stage, and at this juncture in the evolution of our societies, let us play it well and in so doing, ensure by our actions, a brighter world for our children, and their children's children. I thank you.