

ON THE OCCASION
OF THE GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE
INTERNATIONAL MEETING TO REVIEW THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND
DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS)

10 JANUARY -14 JANUARY 2005

STATEMENT BY THE
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE 'ULUKALALA LAVAKA ATA
PRIME MINISTER
OF THE
KINGDOM OF TONGA

THURSDAY 13 JANUARY 2005
PORT LOUIS

Mr President
Secretary General of the United Nations
Secretary General of the International Meeting
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates

Like others before me I join them in expressing Tonga's deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathy to all those affected States whose peoples have been so devastated by the Asian tsunami. And whilst we meet against this tragic backdrop we do so, I believe, with a strong sense of determination and resilience that is the hallmark of the human spirit in times of great adversity. This sense is one only too familiar to small island developing States (SIDS).

Our meeting this week should give valuable impetus and focus to disaster preparedness at the forthcoming World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan.

Mr President

Unlike the 1994 landmark conference in Barbados where the issues surrounding SIDS were firmly encapsulated in a global programme of action, we gather here this week to assess our progress under this programme — not just the progress and performance of SIDS but also, I would suggest, by implication the progress and performance of our development partners.

Much has been reported as to the lack of significant progress on the particular implementation of the Barbados programme but I believe there is a shared sense of responsibility for this lack of progress between SIDS and their development partners. More can and needs to be done to rejuvenate not just the sense of partnership established in Barbados a decade ago but also the spirit of real and concrete implementation given the new and ever present emerging challenges facing SIDS. That spirit lies in the long shadows cast by the Millennium Declaration Goals and the encouraging outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit.

I am hopeful that Mauritius will be to Barbados what Johannesburg was to Rio — a reaffirmation of the three pillars of sustainable development and a landmark signpost of the collective developmental aspirations of SIDS.

Mr President

Reducing poverty in SIDS economies requires sustained and sustainable economic growth founded on increased investment (both foreign and domestic), capacity building and technical progress and access to international trade. Whilst it is understood that international multilateral trade issues remain contentious and ongoing, for it to have a real and significant impact on SIDS countries there is a need for quality market access for our export products — particularly those derived from agriculture and fisheries as well as manufactured goods. Addressing conditions for the concrete participation and

involvement of SIDS in the international multilateral trading system continue to remain issues for considered attention.

Mr President

Like many other SIDS, Tonga's development aspirations and constraints are heavily influenced by its geography especially the distant and remote spread of small islands and small island communities. Improving transportation services whether they be maritime or aviation and strengthening telecommunications continue to be challenging priorities. Maximising the capacities of sectors like these might yet prove a boon to our efforts at improving market access for our export products and in encouraging the ongoing development of tourism and tourism infrastructure but they would seem, for the present, to be elusive. In addition, Tonga continues its steady progress towards accession to the World Trade Organisation. It has also continued its collaboration with other SIDS in the Pacific in collective regional trade arrangements.

Mr President

Whilst Tonga realises the need for significant and sustained investment in our productive trade sectors, other sectors and issues also require similar corresponding attention such as education, ICT, disaster preparedness and of course the ever present issues associated with climate change and sea level rise. To offset some of these challenges, my Government has undertaken an ambitious and robust programme of public sector and economic reform designed to improve public sector performance and provide impetus for improved economic productivity. Such a broad programme has been, amongst other things, the basis for a renewed sense of partnership between Government and other stakeholders.

Tonga has long realised the benefit of complementing its own national endeavours and efforts with collective multilateral ones whether they be through formal regional organisations such as our own Pacific Islands Forum or through formal international organisations such as the United Nations and its agencies as well as wider informal groupings such as the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). This week's meeting is testament to the wisdom and pragmatism of such endeavours and efforts.

In closing Mr. President I wish to extend the sincere gratitude of my delegation and the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga to the Secretary General of the United Nations and, in particular, the Secretary General of this International Meeting (and their dedicated staff) for the logistical and preparatory activities involved in organising this important meeting.

I also wish to especially commend your Government Mr President and the people of Mauritius for their determined and dedicated efforts in hosting this important gathering which has come, I believe, to rich and enduring fruition this week.

I thank you Mr President.