

**INTERNATIONAL MEETING TO REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES**

**STATEMENT BY MR BILL RAMMELL M.P. MINISTER OF
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Introduction

Mr President,

I am delighted to be here in Mauritius to take part in this review of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

The United Kingdom has a long history of close relations with many Small Island Developing States. So we fully appreciate the particular challenges you face. And, although we remain committed to focus resources on low income countries, in areas of special vulnerability we will continue to help wherever we can.

Recent events have all too tragically underlined the potentially devastating and destructive forces of nature. So it is understandable that the main focus for most of us at the moment is the response to the Tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

The UK is doing everything possible to assist those affected by this terrible event. Along with other donors, our current priority is to fund emergency relief operations - to which the UK Government has committed some £75 million. Further British resources are being made available via the EU, tax relief mechanisms, and the G7 agreement to an immediate moratorium on debt repayments by afflicted countries that request it. In addition, the British people have raised over £100 million for the relief effort. This is one of the largest government and public donations anywhere in the world.

We still have to await the full assessment on long-term reconstruction needs. But in all likelihood, that will require a multi-year, multi-donor reconstruction programme. We also need to ensure that the interest in, and commitment to, disaster risk reduction generated by the current crisis is

translated into action in the longer term, not only for the Indian Ocean region but globally as well.

The Jakarta conference last week has already agreed that a warning system is needed in that region. Our Mauritius conference has recognised the need to augment the capacity of small island developing states to predict and respond to emergency situations. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Japan later this month will provide a timely opportunity to consider how this and other needs can be met.

This year, as the UK takes up the Presidencies of the G8 and the EU, we aim to focus in particular on the man-made challenges of climate change which threaten to undermine international efforts to promote sustainable development.

The Earth's climate is changing and there is no longer any serious scientific doubt that the primary cause is the increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere due to human activities. I am pleased to see that the strategy document on which you have been working in Mauritius recognises that the global community, including

small island developing states, must act together to tackle climate change and achieve environmental sustainability.

Sea Level Changes and Biodiversity

Helpfully, this conference has drawn attention to the fact that small island states are among the most vulnerable of all areas to the potential adverse effects of climate change and sea-level rise.

Although the severity of the threat will vary regionally, sea level rise and its consequences could trigger abandonment and significant off-island migration, at great economic and social costs. For many small island states, the prospect of salinity intrusion into the freshwater lens would be a matter of great concern.

As in other regions, it is expected that climate change will affect the biodiversity of small islands directly and indirectly. Among birds, almost a quarter of the species found on islands are threatened, compared with only 11 % of the global bird population.

The UK's Sustainable Development Strategy

For all these reasons, and more, climate change and energy are one of the four priority areas set out in the UK's Sustainable Development Strategy which will be published in March. As part of our wider effort to support international sustainable development, the UK is determined to deliver on its own commitments to mitigating climate change, as well as assisting vulnerable developing countries in coping with its impacts on them.

The UK's Department for International Development has begun work to mainstream climate change adaptation into the UK's bilateral assistance programme, which totalled 2.3 billion pounds in 2002-03. We are also substantially increasing our international aid budget to support the poorest countries in the world, a number of whom are SIDS members.

This demonstrates, I believe, that it is possible to step up our efforts to tackle global poverty , as well as seeking to respond to the enormous terrorist threat that we all face.

Security and development are interdependent. Both are absolutely necessary.

Concluding Remarks

The important series of events ahead of us in 2005, in particular the Millennium Review Summit in September, provides us with a unique opportunity to make real progress towards all our development goals. If we do not future generations will not forgive us.

I would like to conclude my remarks by thanking the Government of Mauritius for hosting this event, which has got the year off to such an excellent start. I look forward to a successful conclusion to our conference tomorrow.