



**Statement by H. E. The Honorable Dr. Marcus Bethel
Minister of Health & the Environment**

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas

International Meeting for the 10 year review of the BPOA for SIDS

Port Louis, Mauritius

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Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

At the outset, I would like to express the heartfelt condolences of the Government and people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas to the people of those countries who were devastated and suffered losses as a result of the recent tsunami disaster. We wish to further express our continued solidarity with our sister nations and share in your efforts toward recovery. I would also like to extend congratulations to the Government of Mauritius on the hosting of this very important and timely international meeting.

Mr. President,

Ten years after the formulation of the Barbados Program of Action it is clear that the special challenges that SIDS face with respect to social and economic development along with their vulnerabilities related to the environment and natural disasters, are factors limiting SIDS' capacity to react and respond to new and existing challenges in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

Mr. President,

While there are many challenges derived from being a SIDS, for The Bahamas these problems are compounded by the fact that we are an archipelagic nation of more than 700 islands having major populations on 30 of them. This multi-island nature causes greater challenges due to the need to replicate services and opportunities in many centers.

Issues which have emerged as significant challenges include:

- our highly specialized economic focus on tourism,
- growing population densities,
- small and vulnerable freshwater supplies,
- sea level rise,
- the susceptibility of our coastal areas to land based sources of pollution,
- the small land mass scattered over 150,000 sq km
- security concerns, including those related to the illegal trafficking of humans, guns and narcotics and
- natural disasters such as hurricanes are all magnified and have been a challenge for my small country.

Mr. President,

In addition, the use of GDP, without recognition of the factors which affect such members, as the primary criterion with respect to the determination of eligibility of certain concessionary funding and/or special and differential treatment has impeded our ability to effectively integrate into global systems. This has negatively impacted our sustainable development strategies.

However, in spite of the seemingly insurmountable odds, The Bahamas has managed to make strides in dealing with the issues identified in the BPOA. The creation of environmental and social agencies with mandates to develop and implement programs and policies to deal with the various issues have been established with the help of international commitment's and maintained and expanded with local resources.

Mr. President,

In The Bahamas we have taken the necessary steps to incorporate sustainable tourism into our development planning process. One emerging focus has been our concentration on eco-tourism including cultural tourism, which is complemented by the fact that large areas In The Bahamas have been given conservation status and collaboration between the public and private sectors, continues to create awareness of the importance of sustainable tourism development among our citizens, even as we aggressively compete for the tourism dollar.

Mr. President,

While tourism development is key in satisfying the socio-economic needs of many SIDS, unsustainable tourism development practices can lead to significant social and environmental degradation. It is therefore necessary for national, regional and international agencies to mobilize their resources to ensure the sustainable development of this vital industry. To this end The Bahamas encourages south-south relationships and dialogue regarding the use of best management practices and lessons learned in the tourism industry.

Mr. President,

While The Bahamas has made progress in the areas identified in 1994, new and emerging issues such as HIV/AIDS, illegal migrants, national security, the onerous demands placed on our financial services sector and an increase in the incidence of natural disaster events are new areas of concern for the sustainable development of my country.

Mr. President,

SIDS are experiencing an increased burden on health care systems and have highlighted the special challenges posed by the increase prevalence of HIV/AIDS given limited skilled workforce. Further the pandemic has had significant impact on our economies as the productive sector succumb to AIDS related illnesses, thus reducing income levels and undermining the social fabric of our societies. The health care system within The Bahamas is further burdened by the demands placed on it by the increasing influx of illegal immigrants. Therefore, management of HIV/AIDS and development of partnerships on health care are both an urgent health issue and a development imperative.

Mr. President,

The recent tragedy of the Asian Tsunami and the unprecedented destructive hurricanes and earthquakes experiences in the Caribbean and the Pacific last year have shown without a doubt the issue of vulnerability of SIDS countries. Within hours a country that would have been considered ready for graduation or economically prosperous using its GDP as the primary criterion could find itself thrown back some 50-70 years without any of the social or economic support systems and its environment totally destroyed or at best significantly impacted.

Mr. President,

Within the Caribbean this is a reality we face every year for 6 of the 12 months and every year the threat of total destruction increases as the frequency and intensity of the hurricanes increase.

Mr. President,

Over arching concerns emerging from this meeting are:

- How will SIDS benefit from this process 10 years from now?
- What if any social or economic constructs will be developed or implemented to assist SIDS with the issues of sustainability? and
- What are the concrete outcomes or follow-up mechanisms which will go beyond Mauritius?

Mr. President,

Let me conclude by indicating some of the key actions that would be of benefit to Caribbean SIDS:

- Enhanced partnerships on
 - o Health issues
 - o Energy and waste including renewable energy
 - o Biodiversity management
 - o Environment protection
 - o Monitoring and evaluation
 - o Security including the response to new threats and challenges
- Strengthening of the institutional arrangements and improved operational coordination with other developing countries
- The strengthening of or establishment of SIDS support mechanisms at the global, United Nations, regional and sub-regional levels
- The mainstreaming of the outcomes of The International Meeting in UN processes as well as the process of other multilateral systems, and
- The provision of new and additional financial resources to implement the outcomes of the Mauritius International Meeting including the use of special access and concessionary terms.

Mr. President

The time for action is now If we are to provide meaningful support mechanisms for sustainable development of SIDS!

The Government of The Bahamas wishes to commend the efforts of our people, NGO's, members of civil society and all other social partners for their invaluable contribution to the implementation of the BPOA. We look forward to developing new partnerships that enhance their roles and our collective results.

As we craft our way forward from Mauritius, we know that the men women and youth of the Caribbean and SIDS in general are resilient and ready partners for the sustainable development of our country, our region and all SIDS.

Thank you,