

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

NOTES FOR REMARKS

BY

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*Small Islands, Big Stakes:
International Meeting to Review the
Implementation of the Program of Action for the
Sustainable Development of Small Island
Developing States*

Port Louis, Mauritius
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On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the organizers of this conference for their hard work in preparing for our important discussions here in Mauritius. I would also like to thank our hosts for welcoming us to this beautiful island and for their warm hospitality.

This is a critical conference. We are here to discuss the future of small island developing states worldwide.

Over the past year and especially in the past few weeks, the world was reminded of the vulnerability of these coastal states. Hurricanes and major storms devastated Haiti, Grenada, and others in the Caribbean region, as well as island countries in the Pacific and Indian oceans. Political instability also rocked some communities.

But the utter devastation caused by the recent earthquake and tsunamis that struck the countries of the Indian Ocean — including this island — has shocked the world. The incredible human toll of this terrible disaster has moved us all to do what we can to try to help.

The scope of the devastation has brought home the importance of working together to respond to the immediate and long-term rescue, humanitarian, and reconstruction needs in the region.

Canada was quick to respond to this tragedy, as it has to other crises.

In the wake of the political upset and the floods that devastated Gonaïves, we provided immediate assistance to Haiti. After hurricane Ivan tore across the island, we contributed to relief and reconstruction efforts in Grenada.

In response to the tragedy that has just swept through many of the countries in this part of the world, the Government of Canada has clearly demonstrated its commitment to recovery and reconstruction.

Canadians are heartbroken by the devastation.

We recognize that the reconstruction efforts will take months, even years. Canada will be there as a full partner for as long as it takes.

Canada has a long history of partnership with small island developing states. Over the past decades, the international community has acquired an understanding and appreciation of the particular development challenges that small countries surrounded by water face — rising sea levels, frequent and violent storms, very fragile ecosystems, dependency on a few commodity exports, isolation, high transport costs, and the growing spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria.

That is why Canada supported — and remains fully committed to — the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States that was set out a decade ago in Barbados.

The objectives of the Barbados Programme of Action remain a sound framework for inter-regional and international partnerships between small island developing states and the donor community.

Much remains to be done to achieve these objectives.

What have we learned since 1994?

That we need programming in priority areas such as ocean governance, climate change, biodiversity, and transport and communications. That we need long-term interventions. That we need cooperation and coordination at the national and regional levels. And that we need to strengthen our partnerships and harmonize our efforts.

Sustainable development is not just about increased funding. It is about targeted, focused efforts to help people to help themselves. If the people of small island nations hope to build better lives for themselves, their communities, and their countries, they must be able to participate in decision-making that affects them.

We see a continued role for multilateral institutions and donor countries, but for any development to be sustainable, the governments and people of the islands must take charge of their own future.

Partnership is key to implement the Barbados Programme of Action. Canada encourages the different stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, local communities, and the private sector to work together closely to address the challenges that small islands face.

Small island developing states must lead the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

They need to collaborate with their neighbours to pool resources and to pursue common interests. They need to fulfil overlapping responsibilities, such as protecting the oceans they share and strengthening regional institutional structures.

On a global scale, as maritime nations, they need to play their part in addressing environmental issues, including adapting to the impacts of climate change and preserving biodiversity.

Canada stands ready to follow their lead, to do its part. We are committed to strengthening the effectiveness of our aid — investing our resources where they can have the greatest possible impact.

For its part, Canada will contribute to the inter-regional ocean governance proposal covering the Caribbean, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and Africa. We will provide immediate technical assistance to develop the proposal further and to solicit financial support from interested partners.

As well, from May 1 to 5 in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada will be hosting an international conference on the Governance of High Seas Fisheries and the UN Fish Agreement.

Together, we have made some progress on the Barbados Programme of Action over the past decade.

To move forward, we need to reduce the gap between sources of funding and field activities. We must all work together to make our existing efforts more effective. We

need to focus our assistance on priority activities identified by small island states themselves.

Canada emphasizes the need to pay increased attention to the regional approach. We believe that implementation of the Barbados objectives must be carried out through existing national and regional operational frameworks with local leadership in full control.

By continuing to work together closely, small islands nations will be able to access the tools and resources they need to reduce poverty effectively, protect the environment, halt and reverse the spread of disease, and foster a vibrant economy. And that will make all the difference in the world.

Thank you.