



Permanent Mission of the Republic of Croatia to the United Nations

STATEMENT BY

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TO THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT

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

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Mr. Secretary General of the United Nations,  
Mr. Secretary General of the Conference,  
Distinguished Heads of State and Government  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset let me join the previous speakers before me to express deepest condolences of the Croatian Government and its people to the victims and their families in the recent tragic events in South Asia, South East Asia and Africa. I would like to inform you that the Croatian government together with the Red Cross has pledged over US\$1,000 000 for the victims and the Croatian Red Cross is still conducting a country-wide campaign through solidarity telephone for voluntary contributions.

Let me also thank Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and particularly the Government of Mauritius for the organisation of this important event and a warm hospitality extended to all participants.

Before I begin, let me say that Croatia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union.

Croatia has been actively engaged in supporting interests of the Small Island Developing States and is also a vice-president of the Bureau of this meeting. Even though Croatia is not an island state, it has 1,185 islands, which make up about 3,300 km<sup>2</sup> or 5.8 percent of Croatia's dry land and 2.5 percent of its population lives there. Hence, we are very well aware of challenges faced by the SIDS.

Therefore, allow me to share with you some aspects of Croatia's experience related to development of islands.

Pursuant to Article 52 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, islands represent a natural resource of special national interest. The state takes care of 120,000 inhabitants on 49 inhabited islands in 57 coastal and island cities and municipalities. In this area there are four national parks that account for 36,000 hectares of island surface area.

In order to enhance development of islands, it created in 1997 the National Programme for the Development of Islands, on the basis of which the 1999 Law on Islands was prepared and adopted and was further amended in 2002. It focuses on sustainable development of islands including a combination of environment viability, social stability and economic growth. There are two groups of documents related to the development of islands:

- 1) National programmes for the development of islands (14 in all) and
- 2) Programmes for sustainable development of islands and groups of islands (26 in all).

Since 1995, the Republic of Croatia allocated about US\$700 million from its national budget to the development of islands. These efforts have been supported by our foreign partners (the World Bank, the Development Bank of the Council of Europe, UNESCO, EU etc.) through co-financing of numerous projects. Croatia, as a candidate country for membership to the European Union, will integrate the issue of

its islands in the negotiation process for EU membership that will start on 17 March of this year as one of priority areas especially regarding environment protection and management of natural resources.

In the national budget funds are earmarked and channelled by the Croatian Bank for Reconstruction and Development for projects in accordance with Article 15 of the Law on Islands ensuring that they fulfil conditions set in the programmes for a sustainable development of islands. Programmes are being prepared by the Ministry of the Sea, Tourism, Transportation and Development, in co-operation with island and coastal authorities. Thus, for example, a programme for financing small and medium-sized enterprises includes activities related to getting adequate health care and social welfare, organic farming, fisheries, stone masonry, sustainable tourism, small shipbuilding, scientific and technological research, trade, traffic, traditional crafts.

Croatian islands have similar challenges as SIDS that we face, among them urban development, water supply, reconstruction and revitalisation of cultural, historical and natural heritage. Additionally, Croatia is faced with intensive depopulation of its islands, particularly of smaller ones that are more distant from the mainland, which results in dying out of island settlements and total neglect of their cultural heritage. In this context Croatia is making efforts to define potentials offered by its islands in order to make them less isolated and more connected to its mainland, but also to extend new possibilities of cooperation in this area with its neighbouring maritime countries as staying and returning of young people to the islands depends on satisfactory living conditions, primarily jobs, easier access to markets, access to education and health services, reconstruction of infrastructure and further development of information and communication technologies.

With a view to preserving rich cultural and historical heritage, attention has recently been increasingly focused on the development of rural island areas, particularly on those islands with a more pronounced process of de-ruralisation and in which indigenous cultural and architectural values are at risk. To date, these efforts were made through a strong will of enthusiasts, but the role of the state is growing especially through local self-government and in cooperation with the institutions specialised in specific activities, ranging from the preservation of cultural heritage to the production of organic food, protection of sea and environment and sustainable tourism. All parts of society, including non-governmental organisations and private sector, as well as international institutions invest huge efforts to protect natural, cultural and historical heritage of Croatian islands. Further development must be based on an appropriate management of natural resources, minding the natural and cultural heritage and the needs of the island population without whom any discussion about the future of Croatian islands is pointless.

Having presented just some aspects of island development in Croatia, it can be seen that we share many challenges faced by SIDS and are prepared to share policies, experience and best practices with interested small island developing states and will continue to support common interests in the international community. In this context, let me emphasise that it is vitally important to adopt at this meeting an action oriented forward looking strategy paper which will also be supported by political will of all our governments.

Thank you.