

International Meeting for the 10-year Review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (five minutes)
Les Pailles Exhibition Centre, Port Louis, Mauritius
10-14 January 2005

**Statement by Mr Kim Hak-Su, Executive Secretary
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be able to address this International Meeting for the 10-year Review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

At the outset, on behalf of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESACP) and myself, I wish to convey my deepest condolences to the member governments and particularly to the family members of victims who perished in the horrific devastation caused by the tsunami waves. While the affected countries and international communities including the United Nations are involved in recovery and rehabilitation work, the long-term large scale reconstruction and resettling of the victims of the tsunami will be of utmost importance to the United Nations.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UNESCAP considers small island developing states (SIDS) in the Indian Ocean, South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean among its important members. Of the 51 global SIDS, 22 of them are members and associate members of UNESCAP.¹ Although these states are distributed over an extremely wide geographic area, their priority concerns, as highlighted in the Barbados Plan of Action, are often very similar.

In the aftermath of the dreadful tsunami, the significance of this International Meeting is further enhanced as not only the affected small island developing states (SIDS) such as the Maldives and Seychelles are vulnerable, but the other SIDS are also equally at risk from natural disasters. As you are well aware, small island developing states, despite their implementation of the Plan, still continue to be environmentally as well as economically and socially vulnerable. Let me cite four important areas of vulnerability.

First, recent devastation resulting from the tsunamis vividly illustrates that small island developing states are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. Since seven of the small island developing states in the Asian and Pacific region are also least developed, their concerns of environmental vulnerability are, furthermore, closely linked to those of economic vulnerability². It is, therefore, essential that measures to

¹ Member countries are Fiji, Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Associate Members are American Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Niue and the Northern Mariana Islands.

² Kiribati, Maldives, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

ensure the economic resilience of these islands are effective and can respond to the challenges faced by them.

- Second, in small island developing states, economic growth often varies considerably owing to high transport costs, small domestic market size, absence of preferential trade arrangements, declining commodity prices and high export concentration. Foreign direct investment and official development assistance also declined in many of these states in recent years. In such small states, effective national economic strategies and development frameworks need to focus on stabilizing long-term economic growth.
- Third, the general population cohort in most of these states is still very young. Greater investment in human resources is essential in order to ensure that these people have greater opportunities in the future.
- Finally, governance in these states has generally improved through the combined effort of all stakeholders and has resolved some of the challenges posed by poverty, environment, security and corruption. For governance to be sound and sustainable in the states in the Pacific region, however, improvements in grassroots and community institutions need to be targeted.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the Asian and Pacific region, many member countries already have the technical expertise and resources to assist the small island developing states in addressing these issues. If the disaster surveillance system that already covers the Pacific region had existed in the Indian Ocean, let me assure you that the tone of this International Meeting would have been considerably brighter.

At this crucial juncture, particularly in the aftermath of tsunami, I would like to request each country to consider ways whereby it can extend tangible assistance to address the needs of the small island developing states. On our part, let me summarize the role and some of the concrete measures that UNESCAP plans to take:

- First, as the regional headquarter of the United Nations in Asia and the Pacific region, UNESCAP will institute a post disaster management system to deal with ensuing predicaments and provide support to the affected members due to natural disasters in a timely fashion.
- Second, the special challenges faced by SIDS will be highlighted in our Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development, scheduled to be held in Seoul in March 2005. As the first regional gathering to take place after this meeting, the outcomes from this meeting and possible actions that could be undertaken at the regional level will be considered by our member countries.
- Third, we will assist in strengthening national institutions and administrative capacity for sustainable development, especially through the integration of environmental considerations into economic and social policy-making. This would enable us to consider both environmental and economic vulnerabilities as a singular issue.

- Fourth, we will furthermore assist in strengthening priority sectors and institutions, and in addressing human resource development needs including poverty and urban squalor.
- Finally, UNESCAP is proposing to hold a Pacific Leaders Summit next year during its 62nd Commission Session to deal with long-term policy coordination issues faced by SIDS in Asia and the Pacific region.

I would finally like to express my appreciation to the Government of Mauritius for graciously hosting this International Meeting and creating an opportunity to discuss these critical issues at the highest levels.

I thank you for your kind attention.