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REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

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

14 JANUARY 2005

PORT LOUIS, MAURITIUS

Mr President,
Mr Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, may I express Singapore's gratitude to the Government of Mauritius for the excellent arrangements and warm hospitality in making this International Meeting for the 10-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action possible. We are also grateful to the Government of Mauritius for its leadership in chairing this important Meeting.

Please allow me to begin by offering my deepest condolences, and those of the people and government of Singapore, to the victims of the recent earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Our hearts go out to the people and countries affected by this catastrophe, including those displaced by the disaster; those who have lost family members, entire families; and even whole communities in this sudden catastrophe; and those who are now painfully coping with the devastating aftermath.

The scale of this disaster is unprecedented in living memory. It is not only a tragedy for South and Southeast Asia, but also a global tragedy. Fatalities and casualties were faced by countries in Asia, as well as in countries as far away as Africa, Europe and the Americas. The death toll from the earthquake and tsunamis currently exceeds 150,000, although we will never know the exact number.

Amidst this tragedy, it is heartening that the world has responded so admirably. The international response to bring relief to the devastated regions has been swift, particularly the current relief efforts of the UN.

On our part, Singapore stands ready to support the UN and the affected countries. Our air and naval bases are open for use by the UN, relief agencies and interested countries. Our military and civil defence assets in Phuket, Thailand, and Aceh and Meulaboh in Indonesia are continuing to work with local authorities and relief agencies in their relief operations. We have also sent equipment and personnel to Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

In addition, the Singapore Government has pledged a sum of S\$5 million for disaster relief in the affected countries. At the Special ASEAN Summit last Thursday, my Prime Minister announced that the Singapore Government will pledge another US\$10 million for longer term reconstruction efforts. Apart from contributions from the Singapore Government, significant donations have been made by individuals and private organisations. The Singapore Red Cross Society (SRCS) has raised S\$27 million as at 8 Jan 05. Singapore reiterates the ASEAN Leaders' call for a Regional Tsunami Early Warning Centre to be established in the Indian Ocean and the Southeast Asia region.

The tsunami has indiscriminately left a path of destruction in many Indian Ocean Rim countries, ranging from India, the second largest country in the world by population, to Maldives, a Small Island Developing State (SIDS). However, this crisis

illustrates the unique vulnerabilities of SIDS to the destructive forces that nature could suddenly unleash.

While all the affected countries face serious challenges in dealing with the tsunami's aftermath, the problems encountered by SIDS are particularly acute because they are typically less endowed with the human, infrastructure and economic resources required to cope with such disasters. Geographical isolation, lack of communication infrastructure and distance from transport hubs compound their vulnerability to environmental vagaries.

We urge the international community, which has been so generous and forthcoming in the relief efforts, to pay special attention to assisting the small island states which have been hit by the tsunami.

It is crucial for SIDS to reduce their environmental and economic vulnerabilities not only to be more resilient to such disasters, but also to help their people achieve a higher standard of living and secure a more sustainable future.

This brings us to the reason why we are all here today. Ten years ago at the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of SIDS in Barbados, UN Member States collectively adopted the Barbados Programme of Action, or BPOA in short. The BPOA was the first-ever intergovernmental statement aimed at addressing the gamut of developmental challenges of SIDS. It spelt out in detail a programme of action at the national, regional and international levels on issues ranging from climate change and sea level rise, natural and environmental disasters, waste management, coastal and marine resources, freshwater resources, land, energy, tourism and biodiversity resources, transport and communications, science and technology, as well as various capacity building issues.

Today, we come from all corners of the globe, to renew our commitment to address the unique challenges faced by SIDS at this ten-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action. Over the last decade, SIDS have pro-actively taken steps to deal with the whole range of developmental issues they face, such as environmental problems including freshwater shortages and waste management. SIDS have also been proactive in working to meet the Millennium Development Goals in areas such as education and health.

However, despite the progress made, much more needs to be done. The challenges faced by SIDS have become more, and not less, complex in the last ten years. SIDS continue to be vulnerable to ecological disasters and their resource constraints are exacerbated by growing population pressures. At the same time, SIDS are also susceptible to fluctuations in international trade which affect the demand for their commodity crops. SIDS risk being marginalised in the liberalising global economy. To achieve the objective of sustainable development as set in the Barbados Programme of Action, there is a pressing need for increased cooperation at the national, regional and international levels.

Singapore is working with SIDS through our technical assistance programmes which relate to capacity building. Singapore is committed to playing our part in sharing our experience and knowledge with our fellow small island developing nations.

Our experience in areas such as urban management, transport planning and design, water management, waste treatment, environmental engineering and management may be of relevance to them.

The Small Island Developing States Technical Cooperation Programme (or SIDSTEC) was launched in 1999. From 1999 to 2004, 315 officials from 33 SIDS countries have participated in the SIDSTEC programme. Overall, the number of SIDS' participants from 36 SIDS countries trained to-date is some 3,350, including those trained under the Singapore Cooperation Programme Training Awards (SCPTA) since 1992.

As SIDSTEC has lapsed in 2004, Singapore is pleased to work in partnership with SIDS to extend SIDSTEC, which will be known as SIDSTEC II from 2005.

Under SIDSTEC II, the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) Training Assistance courses will be extended to offer a wider variety of programmes. These programmes are in areas where we believe that Singapore can make a meaningful contribution and where SIDS can benefit from our own experience. The areas include:

- Tourism Management and Development,
- Developing and Managing a Garden City,
- Environmental Protection and Health Management,
- Sustainable Development and Environmental Management,
- Water and Wastewater Management,
- Humanitarian Emergencies and Disaster Management,
- Information Technology Management,
- Internet Security and Cyber Laws
- e-Government,
- Forensic Medicine and
- Aeronautical, Maritime and Urban Search and Rescue courses.

In addition, more customized courses relevant to SIDS' training needs would be conducted. Singapore therefore welcomes active participation from SIDS countries in our SCP courses.

In order to reduce the vulnerability of SIDS to natural disasters and resource constraints, it is imperative that the sustainable development of SIDS, as set out in the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action receive a high priority. Singapore looks forward to continue working with the UN and the international community in contributing to the sustainable development for Small Island Developing States.

Today and here in Mauritius, Singapore stands ready, together with our fellow developing countries and with SIDS, in particular, to recommit ourselves to the goals and objectives set out ten years ago, to place the developmental paths of SIDS on a firmer and more sustainable footing.