



**STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING TO REVIEW
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES**

By

Dr. Klaus Töpfer

Executive Director

United Nations Environment Programme

(Mauritius, 14 January 2005)

Mr. President,

Distinguished Heads of State and Governments,

Honorable Ministers,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to express our gratitude to the Government and people of Mauritius for hosting this most important meeting on the Comprehensive Review of the Barbados Programme of Action, the excellent arrangements made for this meeting and for the warm hospitality extended to us since our arrival in this beautiful country.

Mr. President, allow me, to express our condolences to all the countries and people who suffered from the devastation of the deadly Tsunami a few weeks ago. UNEP stands ready to assist these countries in areas of its mandates and I wish to inform you that as an immediate step, UN has established a Task Force to coordinate and follow-up on our response to the countries and with the other agencies and programmes of the UN family.

We hope to draw valuable conclusions from our experience and the work of the Task Force to mitigate the impact of such disasters in the future. In light of the Tsunami disaster, it is timely for other regions of the world to review their monitoring systems for all natural disasters with the view of updating them, and where they do not exist, make the necessary plans for their establishment. The Tsunami disaster underscores the critical necessity for such early warning systems.

As a follow up to its initial investment in this area, UN is providing support to the Caribbean SIDS and will share experiences on the establishment of such early warning systems to all SIDS. We believe that this would be valuable in helping these countries to learn from the experiences in South East Asia and to better prepare and plan for natural disasters and mitigate their effects.

Mr. President, the issue of disasters is a real concern for small island developing states especially given the potential for increased severity and frequency of such events from global events such as climate change.

The impacts of the 2004 hurricane season in the Caribbean, and more particularly the devastation of the island of Grenada, illustrate the acute vulnerabilities of all SIDS. Some may argue that natural disasters are not unique to SIDS as was so clearly demonstrated in the Tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean. This I agree with. But what is significantly different is the vulnerability of such states where recovery will take much longer and where environmental, social and economic resilience should be built.

To assist these countries in building this resilience, UN *EP* will continue to work with countries, partners and its sister organizations in the United Nations. Our continued efforts at UN *EP* at improved environmental management and conservation will be aimed not only at safeguarding the natural resources base of SIDS, but also to support economic livelihoods and social stability of the countries.

Recognizing the importance of this problem to the sustainable development of SIDS, UN *EP* will support partners and SIDS with the view of putting appropriate mitigation mechanisms in place. This Mr. President, will take place initially within a regional context, which would then form the basis of UN *EP*'s global response.

Mr. President, UN *EP* will continue to work with SIDS in the further implementation of the Mauritius Strategy. Much of our work in this regard, will take place at the Regional level, but as part of an overall global programme, particularly our Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine and Coastal Environment from Land based Sources of Pollution.

We will build on significant progress we have already made in the various regions working through our Regional Offices and our Regional Seas Secretariats. For example, in the Pacific, UN *EP* is working closely with SPREP in developing a programme for the South Pacific. In the Caribbean, we are working very closely with the CARICOM Secretariat, Caribbean SIDS, and a range of stakeholders and have designed the Caribbean SIDS Programme, which will provide a framework for comprehensive environmental action in the Caribbean.

In Africa, the Abidjan and Nairobi Conventions for the Protection of Coastal and Marine Environments are among our main instruments for support to SIDS.

While this and many of our other regional programmes focus essentially on the environmental pillar of sustainable development, it is critical that closer linkages with social and economic development programmes be strengthened. UNCTAD has committed to facilitating this by embedding a more streamlined and integrated approach to its own multilateral environmental conventions and agreements by working through our various regional offices and programmes.

Given the rapid pace of globalization and the growing emphasis on trade, a critical issue which needs to be given more attention by SIDS is that of trade and environment. This is essential since SIDS are heavily dependant on a limited and fragile environmental resource base for their development. As a consequence, every effort must be made to ensure that environment is not used as a pretext for the establishment of trade barriers to the detriment of SIDS. In this regard, UNCTAD is working closely with UNCTAD in the development and implementation of a Trade and Environment Capacity Building Programme. I am also happy to announce that as part of the South-South Cooperation between Latin America Countries and Caribbean SIDS a special South-South Programme on Environment will be launched in the convening month.

Mr. President, strengthening capacity in SIDS has to be a central concern. Our Governing Council will meet next month to adopt the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building. I mention this Mr. President, only to emphasize the importance of this Strategic Plan to SIDS. The Governing Council will also consider the outcome of the Mauritius meeting and the strategic plan will provide the basis for our further work with SIDS.

Mr. President, in closing I wish to reiterate UNCTAD's continued willingness and commitment to working with SIDS for the further and more effective implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS.

Thank you