

STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE SATO KILMAN, MP

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AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
BARBADOS PROGRAMME OF ACTION, 10 -14 JANUARY 2005
MAURITIUS**

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(Check against delivery)

Mr. President
Mr. Secretary General
Excellencies
Distinguished **delegates**

Monsieur I President

Je **me joins** ceux qui ont pris la parole **avant** moi **pour** vous **feliciter** a propos **de** cette **reunion** historique ici dans ce **magnifique pays** qui est **l'ile Maurice. Ma delegation** aussi voudrais exprime ces **sincere gratitude au gouvernement et** les peuples **de l'ile Maurice pour** leur accueil tres **agre'able pendant** notre **sejour** ici, **et** ainsi que **pour** les **arrangements** grandioses **pour** cette **conference** internationale.

May I also take this time to convey the condolences of my Government and the people of the Republic of Vanuatu to the nations seriously affected by the Asian tsunami. The nation of Vanuatu has been shocked by this tragedy, which has taken the lives of thousands of so many innocent people. The extensive damage caused to infrastructure, coastlines and the natural habitat again demonstrate the extreme uniqueness of the geography of small island developing states, and the increasing vulnerability to natural calamities. The people of Vanuatu wish to offer all those affected our moral support and pray for a speedy recovery in the lives of all the peoples and for the swift rehabilitation and rebuilding of the devastated areas of those nations. In the same vein the people of Vanuatu from all walks of life are putting together a relief package to be donated to those nations as our modest contribution towards the international relief effort.

Mr. President

Allow me this opportunity to briefly highlight a few challenges confronting my country.

Firstly, the principal challenge facing Vanuatu is its low capacity to integrate into the global economy. Irrespective of national sovereignty or preferences globalization dictates and national economies are compelled to adjust accordingly. Like many small island states Vanuatu has not been able to capitalize on the opportunities of globalization and reforms. Structural instability has also tainted performance in all areas including economic and social development. For us, the gains from globalization therefore can only be realized

if proper policies and capacities are in place at the national level. Government debt accumulated sharply in 1997-2000 as government borrowed liberally to reform its institutions and reverse flagging economic performance. The fiscal situation has been difficult to manage as shown by the recurring fiscal deficits and financing by borrowing (and grants).

Secondly, close to eighty percent of the population still depends on the land for their livelihood. However urbanization and "moving to towns" is upsetting the lives of many people in both urban and rural areas. Towns are taking in more people than they can provide services for and rural villages are getting depopulated and neglected and need to be catered for. Furthermore, the high cost of living and rising unemployment, crime and other social issues compound life in the towns.

These circumstances are further characterized by a high population growth rate of 2.7-3%, one of the highest in the world. Since 1994 the population has grown by 31.1% to 187,000 with 79% in the rural areas and 21% in urban areas.

Thirdly, are the associated environmental issues and challenges facing the nation. Rapid development interests to accommodate increased population have exerted considerable pressures on the limited available resources.

Given the challenges the Government has introduced appropriate policy framework in the effort to manage these challenges in the best interests of the nation.

Mr. President

The main response to these challenges in Vanuatu's development has been the Comprehensive Reform Program (CRP) first initiated in 1997 and remains to this day as the principal development framework for the country. The CRP targeted three main areas (i) public sector reform (ii) economic reforms (iii) reform in the social development area and promotion of social equity. Vanuatu borrowed US\$20 million from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to implement these reforms.

The overall intention of the Reform Programme is to devolve power and responsibility to the Provinces and the people but at the same time strengthening the national framework. An assessment of decentralization options has been undertaken and the Government is still studying the report.

Mr. President,

The principles of sustainable development have always been an integral part of our traditional resource management practices and approaches. This is enshrined in the National Constitution. In the pre-CRP years laws amplifying the Constitutional requirement were spread across specific sectors (e.g. fisheries, marine resources, agriculture, waste management, forestry), and the CRP prompted the enactment of the Environmental Management and Conservation Act 2002, which imposes a duty on all investors to submit a formal EIA on all activities likely to generate environment impacts. An array of Committees set up under laws with environment-related responsibilities helps Ministries and the Environment Unit manage and enforce the sustainable development of the environment.

One important lesson from the experience of establishing and implementing sustainable development mechanisms at the national level is that people are more important than the mechanism for they make the mechanism work. The involvement of the community and civil society organizations in the design and implementation of Sustainable Development mechanisms themselves and the creation of networks and partnership in development efforts are also critical for the success of policy implementation. There remains a need for better coordination of Sustainable Development efforts throughout the whole country to avoid duplication of resources. Another of the lessons learnt in the Vanuatu experience is that there is a need for the donor community to provide appropriate financial and technical resources matching the needs and priorities of the country.

At the sector level, Vanuatu signed and ratified a number of international agreements including the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1993 and the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. Since then, Vanuatu has implemented a number of regional and national projects on climate change and sea level rise. Similarly, Vanuatu has signed and ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity through a Ratification Act of 1992 which came into force on 1 March 1993. These have been the main instruments for guiding action in environmental management and conservation of biological resources.

Mr. President,

The successful implementation of sustainable development in Vanuatu depends invariably on the capacity of national institutions, technical and financial resources.

The CRP gave prominence to sustainable development and the environment and a safe, healthy and sustainable environment is one of the priority objectives. There are a number of strategies promoted to pursue this objective. These include:

- (i) amendments to laws governing waste management, water resources, dangerous substances, environmental impact assessment and biodiversity conservation;
- (ii) establishment of land and marine protected areas;
- (iii) identification, survey and registration of sacred sites;
- (iv) consultation among communities on environmental management; and
- (v) the development and implementation of environmental awareness programs.
- (vi) Strengthening of existing customary practices and measures to better manage the environments

The Environmental Management and Conservation Act of 2002 provides a legal framework that guides the mainstreaming of environmental considerations across sectors.

Having said this, Mr. President, there are a number of critical issues that need to be highlighted and appropriately dealt with so that SIDS can further implement the sustainable development principles more effectively at the national level. These include:

- Social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities of SIDS;
- Role of traditional and cultural beliefs, practices and approaches in sustainable development of SIDS; and
- Emerging trends and social challenges such as HIV/Aids and poverty to name a few, and
- Greater partnerships with the development partners and non state actors.

To effectively **manage these challenges**, SIDS would need the support in the following areas:

- sufficient financial and technical resources; and
- an enabling environment at the national, regional and international levels to facilitate and accommodate SIDS' special social, economic and environmental needs and aspirations.

Mr. President,

On trade my country requests special consideration and attention of SIDS by the Multilateral Trading Systems seeking policy flexibility on rules that allow us the leverage to equally participate in the rule-based system of the WTO.

For instance, granting of unlimited access for SIDS products into the international markets and having a stronger voice and representations in the changing international trading regime particularly WTO, ACP/EU Agreement.

On Graduation of Least Developed Countries from the United Nations listing, I wish to strongly recommend to this international meeting that strong consideration be given to the socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States. The Asian Tsunami again demonstrates the need for these vulnerabilities to be seriously considered in determining the graduation of least developed countries.

In 1997 when Vanuatu was recommended by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for LDC graduation, the then Prime Minister successfully argued a case through the UN General Assembly for a review on the criteria taking into consideration economic and environmental vulnerabilities. SIDS must take up that challenge head on and this will require Leaders in SIDS to be more proactive and show more creativity. We, the Leaders, of SIDS have a big responsibility in serving our peoples so it is important we maintain regular contact and dialogue in maintaining the momentum of our development agenda. Too often we become lost in the mirage of other international activities that dilute our interests.

Although the trade chapter is relatively new as far as the implementation of the original Barbados Programme of action is concerned, I am confident this International Meeting has made strides by negotiating and concluding a final text on the trade chapters which are considered as the basis of integrating trade liberalization into the SIDS Sustainable Development framework. Furthermore, it provides a safety net to protect and safe guard the SIDS interests against unfair WTO rules and obligations.

Mr. President,

We strongly endorse the statements made at this Mauritius meeting that;

- Culture is recognized as a foundation for sustainable development in SIDs.
- HIV/AIDS, trade and security issues need to be fully reflected in the final outcome of this international meeting and incorporated into further implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

Furthermore, to successfully implement the Barbados Programme of Action, we strongly endorse the statements made by the Civil Society Organizations and call for stronger and proactive partnerships with the Civil Society Organizations.

We also strongly urge development partners to renew their commitments in further implementation of Sustainable Development framework as outlined in the Barbados Programme of Action.

Before I conclude, Mr. President, I wish to share some key issues of importance to the ROSIS. Vanuatu fully supports the Declaration emanating from the 5th

Summit of Heads of State and Government of AOSIS and believes this solidarity of small island nations is absolutely critical if we are to make some progress.

The AOSIS was pioneered to champion the cause of small island developing states. From its inception this special grouping of countries has gradually developed international recognition however I am inclined to raise critical questions that mirror the organization itself and those of our development partners and other non-AOSIS states. Where is the AOSIS membership heading and is it masquerading behind an agenda that is not in the real interests of the small island states? I know this is a strong statement but it must be said for the benefit of us all. If we are taking evasive action to avoid any form of collision then I urge development partners to demonstrate more comprehension and exercise a greater responsibility to pay more attention to the unique circumstances of small island states.

We cannot change nature but we can change the way we think about nature's effect on small island states. In the ten years since the Barbados Conference we have witnessed a proliferation of issues that clearly illustrate the harsh development realities confronting island states. How humorous is it then that to this day we continue to struggle for appreciation and must fight to the wire in advancing our development aspirations.

If we are to move forward with the SIDS development agenda then there has to be a global mechanism that will coordinate our representation. In that regard, we are calling for a more institutionalized category of AOSIS within the United Nations framework that would allow AOSIS to expand in its role of serving the interests of its members, in partnership with development partners and other important stakeholders. It is time SIDS takes its rightful place in the various fora of the family of nations.

Yesterday, we received an excellent presentation from the UNDP SIDS Expert Group but the main challenge for SIDS is financial constraints. Are development partners prepared to provide financial support, and are we members of SIDS prepared to mobilize and share resources? We can agree to do so much but if we are not able to translate this into cooperative action then all these efforts become futile.

Without any conviction from partners and other stakeholders we will continue to remain pessimistic about the future.

I thank you for your attention.