



Government House

St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands

Statement of the Government of the US Virgin Islands

to the

**International Meeting to Review Implementation of the Programme of Action
for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States**

Swami Vivekananda International Convention Centre

Port Louis, Mauritius

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Head of Delegation

(Please check against delivery)

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General
Distinguished Ministers,

We convene this ten-year review of the Barbados Programme of *Action (B O)* at an especially sobering time, in the wake of the unprecedented devastation caused by the recent Tsunami which traversed the Indian Ocean, from Asia to Africa. We join the international community in expressing our deep sorrow for the tragic loss of life, destruction and displacement of unprecedented proportions.

Mr. President,

In this light, we congratulate the Government of Mauritius for the excellent preparations for this International Meeting, even as the tsunami touched your sacred shores. Indeed, the issue of vulnerability of small island states (SIDS) to such natural disasters cannot be more clearly illustrated than what we have witnessed in recent weeks, and in the massive destruction caused by the hurricanes and cyclones in the Caribbean and Pacific in 2004.

In this regard, the effective implementation of the *B O* continues to be the best approach for sustainable development for SIDS.

In 1992, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), meeting at the Earth Summit in Brazil, began an historic journey to focus world attention on the unique vulnerabilities of SIDS, accomplishing the insertion of a separate programme area for SIDS in the Earth Charter. The 1994 Global Conference in Barbados expanded scope by addressing broader development issues unique to SIDS including inequitable economic and trade relations, natural disasters, environmental degradation, and other factors.

At the five-year review of the UN General Assembly in 1999, SIDS expressed concern over inadequate financial resources to implement the *BPOA*, and voiced dismay over the persistent transportation of nuclear material through SIDS territorial waters. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002, provisions were included for SIDS in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

Clearly, then, the mandate for addressing the special case of SIDS has been well established. It has been further refined at the three regional meetings in Samoa, Cape Verde, and Trinidad & Tobago, respectively. The Nassau Declaration and the AOSIS Strategy Paper adopted at the Inter-Regional Meeting in the Bahamas one year ago crystallised the priority issues of SIDS, and continues to reflect the aspirations - and in many respects - the frustrations of SIDS, whose sustainable development is continually threatened by the unsustainable practices of others.

Mr. President,

For our part, the US Virgin Islands has sought to implement the tenet and spirit of the *BPOA*. However, limited access to relevant UN programmes, despite UN resolutions, impedes our capacity to undertake this task. It is primarily through our associate membership in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean that we make our contribution to

international thinking, conceptualisation and problem solving on these issues. Our participation in UN world conferences is a function of that associate membership, and enhances our capacity. We express our appreciation to UN member States for the continual inclusion of this category of participation.

Through our own efforts we have pursued a programme in natural resource management with the opening of a marine park, in recognition of the challenge of minimising degradation of the marine eco-systems. As a non-autonomous territory, however, this initiative was considerably compromised a few years ago by the unexpected removal from our jurisdiction of over 30,000 acres of submerged land - a concern recognised in General Assembly resolutions.

In a similar vein, recent proposals that would affect fishing in our waters, and which would inhibit traditional fishing techniques, run counter to our own careful scientific data on the sustainable use of our fisheries resources.

In this regard, we reiterate consensus General Assembly resolutions that reaffirm "the inalienable right of ... non self-governing territories to own, develop, or dispose of their) natural resources, including marine resources, and to establish and maintain control over the future development of those resources." President,

In view of these considerations, we have taken a number of new initiatives in implementing the BPOA. We have partnered with our University of the Virgin Islands in a project to minimise erosion caused by construction. We continue to foster energy efficiency and alternative energy through the installation of solar, thermal and photovoltaic systems. We continue to integrate energy efficiency and renewable energy in our public facilities, and to encourage the introduction of hybrid vehicles. We have introduced demonstration projects to explore our wind energy generation potential. In this regard, access to regional programmes of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and other bodies would greatly enhance these efforts. The inclusion of the associate members of regional economic commissions to such programmes helps us further build capacity, and the resolution under consideration before the Economic and Social Council for access to its programmes and institutions should be favourably considered in this light.

Most recently, we have created a new government agency to address the challenges of solid and hazardous waste disposal - and overall, we are reviewing a Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan designed to establish standards to properly manage our sustainable development process.

We continue to contribute to the regional and global sustainable development process. In this regard, we are pleased to support the emerging involvement of our university which has entered into discussions for the expansion of a tsunami warning system envisaged for the wider Caribbean. The University of the Virgin Islands continues to play a lead role in the establishment of the SIDS Universities Consortium.

Also, as chairman of the 23 member UN. Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee, my government continues to play our part in sustainable development initiatives aimed at the wider Caribbean region.

Our most recent initiative is the renewed collaboration with our closest neighbor, the British Virgin Islands, in the recent re-constitution of our Inter-Virgin Islands Council, in a SIDS-SIDS partnership to work together to meet the challenges of sustainable development.

Mr. President, I close with a few observations.

In addition to the well-known disadvantages faced by some SIDS is the added vulnerability of a governance deficit faced by those SIDS which are classified as non self-governing by the General Assembly, and which have not yet achieved a full measure of self-government - a goal of the Millennium Declaration and the United Nations second international decade devoted to this issue.

It is our hope that the review to be undertaken this year by the General Assembly of these two UN initiatives would include sufficient analysis of the status of political and constitutional evolution in the non self-governing territories, consistent with the relevant guidelines adopted by the General Assembly. The capacity of these territories to sustainably develop can be significantly enhanced by the narrowing of the governance deficit inherent in many of these arrangements.

I thank you Mr. President.