



**Statement
by**

**Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
and High Representative**

and

**Secretary-General of the International Meeting for the
10-year Review of the Barbados Programme of Action
for the Sustainable Development of SIDS**

at

**the opening ceremony of the
Civil Society Forum**

6 January 2005

Port Louis, Mauritius

Minister Bhagwan,

Mr. Chellapermal,

Dear Friends,

This Civil Society Forum is taking place when the United Nations system is making massive efforts to mobilize and coordinate international relief aid to the victims of the devastating Asian tsunami. The magnitude of this disaster is enormous and shocking. This disaster serves as a stark reminder of how small island developing states are vulnerable, and ill equipped to confront natural disaster of this magnitude.

At the outset let me express my sincere thanks for the gracious invitation extended to me to address this important forum of civil society, which is being organized just ahead of the International Meeting for the 10-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS in this beautiful country. Civil society is an important stakeholder for the implementation of the Barbados programme of action. Therefore, in my capacity as the Secretary-General of the Mauritius Meeting, I made every effort throughout the process to enhance the involvement of civil society, including the mobilization of financial resources to ensure the broad participation of non-governmental organizations in this Civil Society Forum.

I am particularly pleased to be with you today because of my deep conviction that civil society, the community leaders and the private sector have an important role to play in forging broad based partnerships for ensuring sustainable development for small island developing states. In this context, civil society is a powerful collective force that can set international development agenda and shape world public opinion. The collective power of civil society can also have a serious influence on policy makers for their action. Civil society has also contributed enormously to the national development and policy dialogue.

It is in this context, the strong voice of civil society is needed even more here at this very important conference of the United Nations where world leaders, representatives of governments, international organizations and civil society would come together to chart out a common action plan for the further implementation of the Barbados Programme for the small island developing states. This Civil Society Forum would

provide a strong push for the international community to initiate meaningful action for the sustainable development of these countries.

The United Nations has long recognized the special problems of small island developing States. These countries are especially vulnerable to natural disasters, climate change and the rise of sea level. The interplay of adverse factors such as narrow resource base, small domestic markets and heavy dependence on a few external and remote markets, high costs of energy, infrastructure, transport and communication and uncertain tourism prospects impose constraints on their socio-economic development efforts. The environmental and economic vulnerabilities of these countries present serious complications on the lives and livelihood of their population.

Small island developing States face formidable challenges regarding trade liberalisation and globalisation. They are at risk of remaining marginalized unless urgent measures are undertaken to accord special treatment to these countries for increased market access, development assistance, debt relief, and capacity building. I would, therefore, urge that the United Nations and the multilateral financial and development institutions move with urgency to enhance the development prospects of these countries through supporting human and institutional capacity, technology transfer and export and industrial base diversification. It is high time that the international community lives up to their commitments made in the Barbados Programme ten years ago.

The Mauritius International Meeting should be seen as a joint undertaking and common rallying point for governments of small island developing States with their development partners, including civil society and the private sector, with the sole purpose of further galvanizing international support aimed at overcoming their vulnerabilities. In this context, I am very encouraged that the Civil Society Forum is being held at outset of this International Meeting. I am confident that the Mauritius Conference will also provide you with an excellent opportunity for networking, caucus building and inter-acting with the media representatives and government officials.

Civil society and the private sector should play a major role in the implementation of the outcome of the Mauritius International Meeting and the Barbados Programme of Action. The involvement of civil society in the Mauritius Meeting definitely brings

global public attention to the issue and would persuade the world leaders to give serious attention to the urgent issues confronted by the small island developing states. The active involvement of the civil society should also be seen as public monitoring of the national and global commitments made in Barbados in 1994 and in Mauritius in 2005.

It is in view of this, the United Nations, my office, the UN Office of the High Representative for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states in particular, would like to closely cooperate with civil society at all levels of our endeavour to ensure full and effective implementation of the outcome of this Conference. The outcome of your Forum should be very important contribution to the deliberations at the conference. Therefore, please be encouraged to come up with the specific proposals and ideas for our future collaboration. As the Secretary-General of the Conference, I will make every effort that your voice be heard loud and clear from the podium of the conference. To facilitate this I would like to invite you to report on the outcome of your deliberations at the International Meeting on its opening day. The Mauritius International Meeting should not be seen as an end in itself, the implementation and review process should be pursued vigorously. The process should start here in Mauritius. The representatives of civil society will be invited to present their views at the High-level Segment scheduled for the 13th and 14th January devoted to the way forward and modalities for implementation. As you know, the General Assembly of the United Nations will review the progress in the implementation of the Mauritius outcome. Active and meaningful involvement of civil society will certainly enrich the debate at the General Assembly. In that context, I welcome your proposal to provide the General Assembly with your parallel report on the implementation at the national, regional and global levels on an annual basis.

Please rest assured that I will work tirelessly in close cooperation with civil society that you represent here today to ensure success of the Mauritius Conference and effective follow-up of its outcome.

I wish every success to your deliberations at the Forum.
