



PRESS RELEASE



OFFICE OF THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES,
LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

**Civil Society Participation at United Nations Conference in Mauritius
on Small Islands Developing States**

**Secretary-General of the International Meeting Highlights Economic
Vulnerabilities of Small Islands at the Forum**

United Nations, 7 January 2005: The forum of civil society took place in Mauritius today ahead of a major United Nations international meeting on the future of small island developing states. The Mauritius conference, which begins on 10 January, will address, among other urgent issues, the need for better disaster preparedness in small islands, climate change and the rise of sea level.

Speaking at the Forum, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and the Secretary-General of the United Nations International Meeting on Small Island Developing States, Anwarul K. Chowdhury, extended his deepest sympathies to the people and governments of the countries affected by the disaster, and especially to the small island developing states, and said, “Small island developing states 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. They also face formidable challenges in the face of increasing globalization.”

“The Mauritius International Meeting should be seen as a joint undertaking and common rallying point for governments of small island developing States and their development partners, including civil society and the private sector, with the sole purpose of further galvanizing international support aimed at overcoming their vulnerabilities,” he added.

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Mr. Chowdhury said that the United Nations had long recognized the special problems of small island developing states, vulnerable to natural disasters, climate change and the rise of sea level. “The interplay of adverse factors such as narrow resource bases, 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.”

This disaster serves as a stark reminder of how small island developing states are vulnerable, and ill equipped to confront natural disasters of this magnitude, he reminded.

Over 2,000 participants from the islands, their traditional donor partners and other countries, including some 25 heads of State and Government, will participate from 10 to 14 January in Mauritius in the United Nations International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, agreed upon a decade ago at a Global Conference in Barbados.

The Mauritius Meeting is expected to adopt a proactive strategy to further implement the Barbados Programme of Action, and also address emerging issues such as market access, HIV/AIDS and new security concerns, and new opportunities like the economic potential of information technology and island culture.

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