

# UNITED NATIONS



## **Mauritius International Meeting: Priorities for Small Island Developing States and International Support Measures<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

The 24<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference for Small Countries is taking place in Quebec City, Canada from 30 August to 1 September 2004. It comes at a time when the United Nations, the Commonwealth, along with other stakeholders are in the process of preparing for the ten year review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the sustainable development of the Small Island Developing States. The United Nations International Meeting that will undertake the review scheduled to be held in Mauritius from 10 to 14 January 2005.

The contribution of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference to this international dialogue and negotiations will be most pertinent. The Commonwealth has always paid special attention to the interests of small states, and this is appropriate as 32 of the Commonwealth's 54 members are small states.

The Commonwealth recognizes that small states are more vulnerable than larger developing countries to shocks as well as threats to their sovereignty, security and natural resources. It has been noted that many of these small states find it difficult to access markets and international assistance, and that individually they lack negotiating power.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is being submitted to the 24<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference for Small Countries in pursuance of a request by Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Secretariat to the United Nations High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

## **United Nations Office of the High Representative**

The UNOHR was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2001<sup>2</sup> with functions recommended by the Secretary-General<sup>3</sup>. The General Assembly requested Member States, all United Nations system organizations, and other relevant multilateral organizations to extend full support and cooperation to the Office of the High Representative. United Nations Under-Secretary-General Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury was appointed the High Representative.

When it comes to the Least Developed Countries, the UNOHR is mandated to ensure the full mobilization and coordination of all parts of the United Nations system, with a view to facilitating the coordinated implementation of and coherence in the follow-up and monitoring of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries at the country, regional and global levels. The Office provides coordinated support to the Economic and Social Council as well as the General Assembly in assessing progress and in conducting the annual review of the implementation of the Programme of Action.

In the case of the Landlocked Developing Countries UNOHR supports, as appropriate, the coordinated follow-up of the implementation of the 2003 Almaty Declaration and Programme of Action for Transit Transport Cooperation between Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and the Donor Community.

Such coordinated follow-up by the UNOHR also applies to the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

One of the key functions of the UNOHR has been to undertake appropriate advocacy work in favor of the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States in partnership with the relevant parts of the United Nations as well as with the civil society, media, academia and foundations.

Finally, it is also the responsibility of the UNOHR to assist in mobilizing international support and resources for the implementation of the programmes of action for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

In keeping with the United Nations mandate to the UNOHR, Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury was appointed the Secretary-General of the 2003 Almaty conference for the Landlocked Developing Countries. Subsequently, when the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly decided to hold an International Meeting for the ten year review of the Barbados Programme of Action, Mr. Chowdhury was designated the Secretary-General of the International Meeting scheduled to be held in Mauritius from 10-14 January 2005.

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<sup>2</sup> Resolution 56/227

<sup>3</sup> Paragraph 17 of Secretary-General's report A/56/645

## **Background of the International Meeting for the ten year review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the sustainable development of SIDS**

The idea of the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) emanated from the 1992 United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) – *the Earth Summit* – held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (3-14 June 1992).

The Earth Summit addressed urgent problems of environmental protection and socio-economic development. The leaders at the Summit signed the Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, endorsed the Rio Declaration and the Forest Principles, and adopted Agenda 21, for achieving sustainable development in the 21st century.

In order to promote the well being of people living in island countries, the Earth Summit called for the United Nations to convene a Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The Conference was held in Barbados in May 1994 and produced a Programme of Action to assist these environmentally and economically vulnerable countries.

Agenda 21 was adopted at the UNCED. In terms of economic and social dimensions, Agenda 21 emphasizes international cooperation to accelerate sustainable development in developing countries and related domestic policies. The main issues were combating poverty, changing consumption patterns, demographic dynamics and sustainability, and protecting and promoting human health conditions.

Conservation and management of resources for development was posited as an essential segment of Agenda 21, and included protection of the atmosphere, management of land resources, combating deforestation, managing fragile ecosystems, promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development, conservation of biological diversity, environmentally sound management of biotechnology, protection of the oceans and seas, protection of the quality and supply of freshwater resources, environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals, hazardous and/or radio-active wastes, and sewage related issues.

### **Barbados Programme of Action – The fourteen priorities**

The 1994 Global Conference for the sustainable development of the SIDS was held in Barbados, where the Barbados Programme of Action for SIDS (BPOA) was adopted. The BPOA presents a basis for action in fourteen agreed priority areas and defines a number of actions and policies related to environment and development planning that should be undertaken by SIDS with the cooperation and assistance of the international community.

The fourteen priorities outlined in the BPOA are reflected below:

- 1- Climate change and sea level rise
- 2- Natural and environmental disasters
- 3- Management of wastes
- 4- Coastal and marine resources
- 5- Freshwater resources
- 6- Land resources
- 7- Energy resources
- 8- Tourism resources
- 9- Biodiversity resources
- 10- National institutions and administrative capacity
- 11- Regional institutions and technical cooperation
- 12- Transport and communication
- 13- Science and technology
- 14- Human resource development

A comprehensive review of the BPOA was conducted after five years of Barbados at the Twenty-second Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly (27-28 September 1999). The Session adopted a declaration and endorsed the Programme of Action outlined in the recommendations of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory body.<sup>4</sup>

The concerns and the specific constraints of SIDS were clearly recognized. Among other things, it was noted that the means of implementation required taking into account national and regional sustainable development strategies, and the need to create strong and committed partnerships between the SIDS and the international community.

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<sup>4</sup> General Assembly resolution A/RES/S-22/2 of 12 June 2000

It was noted that resource mobilization was clearly one of the main challenges for SIDS. This aspect remains crucial and needs to be addressed with a new resolve by all partners to provide impetus at every level to implement the BPOA.

### **Millennium Summit**

In 2000, Heads of State/Government and other world leaders at the United Nations resolved in the Millennium Declaration to address the special needs of Small Island Developing States, and expressed their commitment to implementing the Barbados Programme of Action and the outcome of the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly “rapidly and in full”. They also urged the international community to ensure that, in the development of a vulnerability index, the special needs of Small Island Developing States are taken into account. The road map towards the implementation of the Millennium Declaration has subsequently outlined the following strategies for SIDS:

- Ensuring progress towards special and differential treatment of Small Island Developing States in the financial and trade-related spheres;
- Supporting and assisting Small Island Developing States in specific aspects of multilateral trade negotiations;
- Supporting any additional efforts necessary towards the implementation of the BPOA.

The International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey, Mexico (18-22 March 2002) addressed the challenges of financing for development around the world, particularly in developing countries. The goal was to eradicate poverty, achieve sustained economic growth and promote sustainable development within a fully inclusive and equitable global economic system.

The conference, while calling for special consideration for disadvantaged countries, reaffirmed the commitment of Heads of State or Government to the BPOA. At Monterrey the developed countries also made substantive commitments to enhance Official Development Assistance (ODA) that had been declining during the past decade.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (24 August - 4 September, 2002), held in Johannesburg, South Africa, drew up a declaration on sustainable development and a Plan of Implementation. The Johannesburg Summit builds on the Earth Summit and Agenda 21, which emphasize protection of the environment, and social and economic development as fundamentals to sustainable development. The Summit set more concrete and tangible targets, timetables, and commitments on a wide range of issues, including poverty eradication, devising sound environmental patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; trade issues; health and sustainable development; and regional initiatives with a special concern for Africa and Small Island Developing States.

## **Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI)**

The JPOI called on the international community to undertake a full and comprehensive review of the implementation of the BPOA in 2004, in accordance with General Assembly resolution S-22/2, and requested the Assembly to consider convening an international meeting for the review of the BPOA.

The United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 57/262 called for an international meeting to undertake a full and comprehensive review of the implementation of the BPOA. This was in pursuance of the JPOI. In resolution 58/213, the General Assembly accepted the offer of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius to host the international meeting. The meeting was scheduled to take place in Mauritius from 30 August to 3 September 2004. These initial dates had to be changed as Mauritius requested a postponement. The new dates approved by the General Assembly for the International Meeting are 10 to 14 January 2005, including a high-level segment on 13 and 14 January, and possible informal consultations on 8 and 9 January 2005 (A/58/213 B).

## **Preparations for the Mauritius International Meeting**

Three regional preparatory meetings have been held as follows:

- Apia, Samoa, 4-8 August 2003 for the Pacific region
- Praia, Cape Verde, 1-5 September 2003 for the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and the South China Sea (AIMS) region. A resumed meeting of the AIMS preparatory meeting was held in Mahe, Seychelles, 8-10 January 2004.
- Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 6-10 October 2003 for the Caribbean region

An Inter-regional Meeting to consider the reports of the three regional meetings was held in Nassau, the Bahamas from 26 to 30 January 2004. This meeting resulted in two documents, namely, the Nassau Declaration and the AOSIS Strategy Paper.

The AOSIS Strategy Paper was endorsed by the Group of 77 and China on 4 March 2004 and submitted as the Group of 77 Strategy Paper to the preparatory meeting of the 12<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

At the global level, a three-day open-ended preparatory meeting for the International Meeting took place in New York as part of the 12<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Sustainable Development from 14 to 16 April 2004. As work on the draft strategy paper could not be completed at the preparatory meeting, the Commission appointed Ambassador Don MacKay, Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations as the Facilitator. The responsibility of the Facilitator is to organize informal

consultations on the draft strategy paper so that most issues could be ironed out by the time delegations reached Mauritius for the International Meeting.

## **Conclusion**

In his opening statement at the 2002 Small States Forum in Washington D.C., Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury said that the United Nations has recognized the special needs of Small Island Developing States arising from their small size, remoteness and isolation from the mainstream of the world economy and international trading system, vulnerability to natural disasters, fragile ecosystems, vulnerability to exogenous economic and financial shocks, and limited or lack of natural resources and fresh water. The adoption of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in 1994 was a turning point in recognizing the special needs of these countries at the global level and in galvanizing international support for their sustainable development.

Mr. Chowdhury emphasized that the international community must now turn seriously to live up to its commitments and to respond to the challenges faced by these vulnerable countries. It is necessary to find a renewed vision for the future of the men and women in the Small Island Developing States.

In this effort of the United Nations and the international community at large, the role of the Commonwealth is very important and crucial to promote the sustainable development of small countries and help in safeguarding their vital national interests.

The UNOHR has been in close touch with the Commonwealth to chart out the cooperation that would best serve the interests of the small states. Since UNOHR came into existence, High Representative Mr. Anwarul Chowdhury has had three meetings with the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Don McKinnon. The UNOHR seeks to enhance its collaboration with the Commonwealth --- and on a regular basis. To overcome the lack of progress in implementing the BPOA over the past decade, the implementation of the outcomes of the Mauritius International Meeting will require much closer involvement of both regional bodies and national institutions. The support of parliaments in the continued efforts to implement the international programmes for the Small Island Developing States will be critical.

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New York  
18 August 2004