



“WILL IT BE AN ILLUSION TO BE PURSUED BUT NEVER ATTAINED?”

STATEMENT

BY

THE HON. DR. KENNY D. ANTHONY

PRIME MINISTER OF SAINT LUCIA

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

Fifteen years ago, I addressed this august body on the occasion of the Millennium Summit, which adopted the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). I said then, that we were gathered to reconfirm that the principles of the United Nations system could lead our world into a new millennium with an expectation of freedom from poverty, freedom from hunger, freedom from war, freedom from the dictatorship of the mighty, freedom for us to enjoy our right to development. I spoke of the unique challenges confronting Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like mine.

CHALLENGES FOR SIDS PERSIST

Fifteen years later, very little has changed for most Small Island Developing States. My country's share of the global space has never before been more affected by decisions and policies taken beyond its borders.

We are affected by multiple economic, social and environmental crises that are having profound impacts on our Caribbean island States.

Despite some progress in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, the promise of a world free of poverty, hunger, war and dictatorships, in the words of the late Haile Selassie and brought to verse by Bob Marley, 'remains but a fleeting illusion, to be pursued but never attained.'

AN IMPORTANT YEAR FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

This year is particularly important for developing countries that are grappling with the challenge of charting a viable path to balanced, sustainable development.

In March, we gathered in Sendai to agree on a global framework for disaster risk reduction. Yet, events in Saint Lucia's sister island of Dominica, following the passage of Tropical Storm Erika just over one month ago, serve to underscore just how vulnerable our countries are to natural disasters. The storm killed dozens of citizens, displaced hundreds who are now unable to earn a living, and has resulted in damage of almost one hundred percent of that country's GDP.

Unfortunately, Erika was merely one in a long and continuing series of extreme weather events that wreaks havoc with lives, livelihoods and economies across our region.

My own country, Saint Lucia, has suffered through two major storms and three severe droughts in the last five years. This means we are constantly going through debilitating cycles of repair and recovery, which are primarily responsible for the massive public debt overhang that constrains our best development efforts.

In July, in Addis Ababa, the international community agreed to a new global framework for financing development in the post-2015 period. This is expected to take cognizance of the special needs of Small Island Developing States, as clearly articulated in the SAMOA Pathway, and will provide access to the financing necessary to realise the goals set out in that Pathway.

I can only hope that this is not another example of the pious and self-serving declarations that have come to typify these organs of the international community. We need action and commitment because our countries' existence may well depend on it.

ECOLOGY AND THE ECONOMY

Our adoption of these 17 Sustainable Development Goals suggests that we have progressed in our understanding of the profound challenges that face developing countries. It is also instructive that several of the Sustainable Development Goals speak directly to environmental issues.

This gives me hope that we may be finally embracing the advice of The World Commission on Environment and Development in its seminal publication in 1987, entitled *Our Common Future*, when it spoke of the interconnectedness of ecology and economy.

However, actions in another negotiating theatre have caused me to question whether this critical connection between ecology and economy is fully appreciated.

THE CLIMATE CHANGE IMPERATIVE

Mr. President, I am concerned about the slow pace of the negotiations toward a new Climate Change Agreement. I am beginning to despair that some among us may not yet have grasped the urgency of the situation for Small Island Developing States. I want to believe that it is not that we are simply being ignored.

There are roughly two months until the opening of the Climate Change Conference in Paris. However, the current pledges of cuts in greenhouse gas emissions are nowhere close to keeping global warming within the threshold that has been set for the survival of Small Island Developing States.

Additionally, the lethargic pace at which Climate Finance instruments are being capitalised indicates that the rhetoric of good political intentions is meaningless without demonstrated and tangible collective action.

OTHER IMPEDIMENTS TO ACHIEVING THE SDGS

Mr. President, our pronouncements and commitments must be given substance if people in Small Island Developing States like mine are to have any hope that this Post-2015 Development Agenda will amount to something meaningful for them. We cannot continue with this diet of rhetoric, platitudes and broken promises.

The arbitrary 'black listing' of some Caribbean countries as harmful tax havens, the cynical use of an inadequate GDP-per-capita metric to determine our eligibility for concessional financing, and the apparent lack of appreciation of the urgent need for a solution to the heavy debt burden being carried by nearly every Caribbean country, all militate against the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

What should happen if our States collapse? Are our people to face becoming refugees on the shores of other lands? All we ask is that the world gives a fair chance to our Small Island Developing States.

CONCLUSION: A RENEWED SENSE OF PURPOSE

Mr. President, Excellencies, we have a Post-2015 Development Agenda in our hands that must be treated with a renewed sense of purpose. We must put an end, once and for all, to hollow promises that are more honoured in the breach than the observance.

We are here at a special, historical juncture; we have a chance for new beginnings. We should not evade today's responsibilities for they will surely catch up with us tomorrow. We Small Island Developing States are not the cause of climate change, but we will be part of the solution.

Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, my country can only pray that we have not been called, once again, to craft and agree to "fleeting illusions to be pursued but never attained."

I thank you.