

Major Group for Children & Youth Statement
3rd International Conference on SIDS, Apia, Samoa
3rd September 2014

Mr. the Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates and Friends,

Relax yourself, close your eyes, free your mind from any tension, and be present in the now. Let us take you on a journey to the future we dream of.

Envision a more self-sustaining, climate resilient, inclusive, healthy, responsive, accountable and transparent SIDS, where all young people are empowered as equal partners in global efforts for sustainable development.

You may open your eyes now. You just had a vision about the world we want. In order to make this vision a reality, we need to be systematically included as partners.

Recognizing the differences which exist between the three SIDS regions, we have identified six common areas critical to the livelihoods of the young people.

- **Good governance and youth participation**

While youth are being considered to participate in the decision making processes leading up to the Post-2015 Development Agenda, it seems that we are only coming here to be present. We, young people from SIDS, need to be empowered in having a true leadership role and a real voice at the table - from planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all processes, so as to ensure strengthened transparency and meritocracy. Though, the world considers us the leaders of tomorrow and, even try to portray we are the leaders of today; they failed in letting go of the control, and encourage something as simple as a fully youth-led forum, for example.

- **Education, entrepreneurship and employment**

There needs to more recognition of the fact that our educational systems are somewhat outdated. The gaps which exist are, unfortunately, not being effectively addressed, and as a result youth are not being able to adapt themselves with real world problems. It is also clear that the current structure is aimed at producing job seekers rather than job creators. We demand that partnerships be formed among youth, governments, the private sector and all educational institutions to review their educational curriculum and ensure it is inclusive of those transferable skills all youth need to maintain sustainability within our communities. This review should also result in a more holistic learning and teaching approach, such as experiential learning, and be inclusive of marginalized youth, and those with different learning abilities.

- **Science and technology**

Science and technology is the engine of industry and can provide solutions to many of the issues facing SIDS. We believe that connectivity is a global right and that no person from our generation should be on the wrong side of the technological divide. As such, we require enhancement of Information and Communication Technology infrastructure to progressively move towards 100 % access to reliable, affordable and fast speed Internet across the three SIDS regions to enable inter-regional youth connectivity, innovation and partnerships.

- **Climate change and biodiversity**

The threats from climate change in SIDS cannot be overemphasized. SIDS remain the most vulnerable to the impacts of this global phenomenon, and if the past two days of the Third International SIDS Conference has identified anything then it is that **“we need bold leaders and stronger political will and solidarity amongst SIDS for any real action on climate change.”** We need governments to promote science education for climate change at all levels and support young people to lead programs of sensitization with regards to the impacts of climate change.

- **Health**

It is clear that within the health sector there is a general neglect of basic health services and support for reproductive health, mental health, NCDs and STIs among the youth in SIDS. Young people are in desperate need of stable, hygienic and a healthy life in order to sustain prosperous living and ensure development among their regions. Actions need to be taken in order to prevent social, cultural, regulatory and discriminatory barriers which exist in the accessing of quality and youth friendly health services, specifically as it relates to sexual and reproductive health and rights to information, services and comprehensive sexuality education in both formal and informal settings for rural and urban areas.

- **Water, oceans and sustainable energy**

We recognize that water is essential for all aspects of life. We also take into account that most member states have articulated their concerns with regard to the degradation of marine eco-systems, and the importance of the ocean economy with sustainability as its foundation, underscoring that oceans are indeed the future of SIDS. There is a strong need for review, enforcement, implementation, and regulation of policies and legislation at all levels on sustainable fresh water system, sanitation services and ocean management. In addition, we urge governments to ensure increased access and affordability of renewable energy technologies in SIDS.

We also wish to highlight that there are **specific regional priorities** that call for proper youth volunteer program, regional cooperation and synergy, and easier travel access within the AIMS region; proper documentation of youth work and comprehensive involvement within the Caribbean; and ensuring social inclusion of Pacific youth through fostering cultural identity and spiritual well-being.

We, the young people, recognize the importance of also taking ownership of our contribution to the sustainable development of our communities and by extension, our regions. Therefore, we will work to create a unified network of children and youth climate and biodiversity partnerships in our regions, continue with educational advocacy in our schools and communities, implement various peer-to-peer programmes, and cooperate with governments and other stakeholders in leading sustainable solutions.

Each one of us represents a piece of a jigsaw puzzle that, when put together forms a picture of the sustainable islands we dream of. Children and youth already play an active role in providing solutions to existing issues in SIDS regions, be it at the highest level of policy making but also in implementation and action at the grassroots level.

Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. We are aspiring to be that generation.

On behalf of Children and Youth, we invite you to work with us as partners and be ambassadors of young people within your governments, regions and global politics.