



**REMARKS**

**BY THE**

**SECRETARY-GENERAL  
CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)  
AMBASSADOR IRWIN LAROCQUE**

**AT THE**

**CARIBBEAN REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUE  
AND REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE  
MIDTERM REVIEW OF THE SAMOA PATHWAY**

**SAN PEDRO, BELIZE  
6-9 AUGUST 2018**



- ❖ The Rt. Hon. Dean Barrow, Prime Minister of Belize;
- ❖ Her Excellency Ms. Lois M Young, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Belize to the United Nations, Vice Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS);
- ❖ Ms. Fekitamoeloa Utoikamanu, United Nations Under Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
- ❖ Other Representatives of Various Partner Organisations;
- ❖ Special Invitees;
- ❖ Ladies and Gentlemen.

Four years ago in Samoa, the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) provided an opportunity to refocus the world's attention on a group of countries that present a special case for sustainable development in view of their unique and particular vulnerabilities. The outcome document of that Conference, the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway (the SAMOA Pathway), recognised the need to support and invest in those nations so they can achieve sustainable development.

Next year in September a one-day high-level session at the United Nations Headquarters is being convened for a mid-term review of the progress made in addressing the priorities of SIDS through the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway.

This Regional Preparatory Meeting ahead of that review will allow us as Caribbean SIDS an opportunity to assess progress achieved in the implementation of the Pathway, and to discuss possible themes and desirable outcomes of the mid-term review. It will also help to identify emerging priorities to be presented at an interregional Meeting with SIDS from the Pacific and Indian Ocean Regions to be held in Samoa in October 2018.

The importance of this process was noted by the CARICOM Heads of Government at their recent Meeting in Jamaica. In doing so, they expressed concern at the slow pace of implementation of the SAMOA Pathway. They agreed that we must work closely with the international community to take the necessary action to build the environmental, social and economic resilience of SIDS.

We must also remain steadfast in promoting the interests of SIDS, particularly, as there are signs that this categorisation of nations like ours is being challenged. It is in the Caribbean, 24 years ago, that the SIDS grouping had its origin with the Barbados Programme of Action of 1994. The subsequent Mauritius Strategy of Implementation (MSI) of 2005, and now the SAMOA Pathway of 2014 served to cement the distinct characteristics and needs of these uniquely vulnerable nations.

The smouldering erosion at the international level of the attention placed on SIDS is a matter of grave concern. It has played its part in hindering the implementation of the Pathway through the lack of resources.

Further, our Community is faced with the question of whether our Member States should get special treatment as SIDS because of their classification as Middle Income Countries. This must be responded to vigorously.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has pointed out that our Member States “exhibit extreme versions of long-term low growth, high debt, significant vulnerabilities and limited resilience to shocks which set them apart from other middle-income states”.

We have the experience of such a classification which has resulted in many of our Member States being graduated out of access to concessional development financing. This is in a context in which the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) has observed a declining trend in Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to the Region over the last 20 years, falling from 0.72% of global ODA in 2000 to 0.52% in 2016.

We must not waver in our efforts to have the international community desist from using GDP per capita as a principal criterion in determining access to concessional development financing especially for SIDS. Substantial weight must be accorded to our vulnerability in this regard.

According to statistics from both the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) and the CDB, two thirds of the CARICOM countries had debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratios in 2016 above the 60% threshold, generally regarded as the benchmark for debt sustainability.

It must be noted that a significant portion of the debt is due to external economic shocks and from the reconstruction after natural disasters.

It is crucial therefore that urgent attention be paid to reducing that debt burden. Recognition of the need for debt relief has spawned innovative mechanisms such as debt swaps for climate adaptation proposed by UNECLAC. The proposal calls for a Caribbean Resilience Fund (CRF) which will finance investment in climate resilience, green growth and structural transformation in the economies of the Region.

Disasters in general hinder development and growth, reduce both output and government revenue, and demand high levels of expenditures on disaster preparedness and reconstruction.

Indeed, the cost of damage and reconstruction sometimes reach much higher than the affected State's GDP. It should be noted that the World Bank has estimated that every dollar spent on resilience saves four dollars on damage and reconstruction costs.

For many of our countries sustained economic growth is being stifled by costly reconstruction in the aftermath of natural disasters. It has been recorded that between 2000 and 2017, CARICOM Member States suffered at least seven disasters in which the cost of damage ranged from 33% to 226% of the affected country's GDP.

Natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes and droughts are forecast to become more frequent and more intense. This is the new normal that our SIDS must face.

And we do so as the global focus is diminishing on the situation of SIDS, and is fixed on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is incumbent upon us to ensure that the SDGs are pursued in the context of SIDS special circumstances including vulnerability to natural disasters, effects of climate change, small size and limited natural resource base.

For us in the Caribbean other critical issues to be addressed include 'de-risking' and 'blacklisting', both of which pose threats to the financial services sectors and economic activities of our Member States. Whether in implementing the Pathway or achieving the SDGs, these are realities that confront our CARICOM SIDS.

We must therefore at this session hone our strategy, to collaborate with our partners in the Indian Ocean and Pacific States to support our positions, so that the unified strength of all SIDS go forward to the High-Level Meeting in 2019.

I firmly believe in a "SIDS Collectivity" and in strengthening "SIDS inter-and intra-regional cooperation" as one of the underlying and fundamental pillars for strengthening the process.

I therefore give my assurance, as Secretary-General that I will endeavour to reach out to my counterparts in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Regions to ensure that our collective influence is used to give us the best chance of a positive response to our needs as we seek to fulfil the objectives of the Pathway and attain the SDGs.

I thank you.