

Welcome Remarks

SIDS Caribbean Regional Partnership Dialogue

6th August 2018

Hon. Minister Dr. Omar Figueroa

Distinguished Delegates,

On behalf of the Government and people of Belize, I wish to warmly welcome all of you to Belize.

The hosting of the Caribbean Regional Partnership Dialogue and Regional Preparatory Meeting is a privilege not only because of the significance of the meeting for the global SIDS Agenda but even more so because of the occasion it brings for the Caribbean to define the priorities for that Agenda over the next five years.

That we are here today in the company of such esteemed delegates makes our task ahead all the more auspicious. Many of you have been instrumental in the organization of the meeting with special recognition due to the United Nations, especially the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean through its sub-regional headquarters, the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee. It would be remiss of me not to recognize the efforts of our own team here on the ground coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and supported by the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Human Development.

Belize is the last stop in the regional preparatory process before we convene with our fellow SIDS of the AIMS and the Pacific regions in Samoa for the inter regional preparatory meeting for the midterm review of the SAMOA Pathway. The Caribbean SIDS meeting is therefore our signature moment to assess where we are; to envision where we want to go; and to define how we want to get there.

Already the outcomes of the other SIDS regional meetings share a common concern that the SIDS Agenda is being progressively overshadowed multilaterally, and as a result, the special case of SIDS is being weathered down in the international climate spotlight despite empirical evidence pointing to its growing gravity.

The gravity of the SIDS' special case is especially apparent in the Caribbean region where we see a confluence of global challenges impairing national capacity and threatening the future of our people.

SIDS are on the frontline! This is no trite matter.

Climate change impacts in our region are undeniable.

Our small economies, embattled already with unsustainable debt levels, struggle to keep pace with outsized needs for adaptation, and to bridge liquidity gaps from one disaster to another. And they continue to underperform relative to key comparators in the regional and global context.

The macroeconomic challenges which are directly linked to the unique characteristics of SIDS persist but it goes without saying that they are worsening. For the Caribbean it is especially alarming that the average youth unemployment rate is nearly 25 percent which does not augur well for already declining labour productivity.

Faced with such odds, we have historically drawn on what unites us to attract global attention to the SIDS cause. While no doubt we have been beneficiaries, the world itself has been the better for the success of our initiatives.

History will show that the Caribbean has served as the cradle of a number of initiatives that resulted in landmark global agreements. The first SIDS Agenda was adopted in Barbados. What constitutes the framework Convention on the Law of the Sea was adopted in Jamaica. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has been hailed as a singular triumph of SIDS with the Caribbean leading the way. The seeds that led to the International Criminal Court and to a global declaration on the prevention of Non-communicable Diseases were sown in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Caribbean's role in the international arena is legendary. We are often the voice of reason and at the same time the voice of ambition. We see the hallmark of our efforts in the ongoing Paris Agreement climate change talks. The Caribbean is also at the forefront charting a new frontier in the international law of the sea in areas beyond national jurisdiction. We are also progressing SIDS specific solutions for financing sustainable development that aim to optimize our natural and human capital. In our region countries are exploring how to harness those resources through different models of the green economy, the blue economy and now the orange economy. And while these may be SIDS specific, they are nonetheless models for other developing countries.

SIDS **magnify** the challenges that the world faces. Our vulnerabilities to climate change are a harbinger of the vulnerabilities of others in the longer run. Our challenges with managing scarce resources in limited spaces are the challenges the world will need to confront sooner rather than later. But we are not just a reflection of global challenge, SIDS **are** a reflection of the opportunities for global solutions.

SIDS **are** a special case! And how the world responds will be a test of its commitment to the most vulnerable and a benchmark for how it will respond to global challenges to sustainable development.

Distinguished Delegates,

It is my honour now to declare open the Caribbean SIDS Regional Preparatory Meeting. I wish you every success in your deliberations and look forward to a robust outcome to accelerate the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the wider SIDS Agenda.