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United Nations > Economic and social development > DESA > Office of the Under-Secretary-General > Statements by the Under-Secretary-General

Remarks by Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs to the High-Level Roundtable on International Cooperation for Sustainable Development in Caribbean Small Island Developing States Bridgetown, Barbados, 25-26 March 2008

Opening remarks (25 March)

Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados,
Mr. Christopher Sinckler,

Your Excellency, Ms. Kristin Arnadottir, Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Iceland,

Your Excellency, Mr. Angus Friday, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Grenada to the United Nations and Chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you on the beautiful island of Barbados for this High-level Roundtable on International Cooperation for Sustainable Development in Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

It is fitting that this meeting has been convened here, where Member States met in 1994 to adopt the landmark Barbados Programme of Action. That document set out the critical challenges facing SIDS. Since that time, and since the adoption of the Mauritius Strategy January 2005, we have seen Caribbean SIDS successfully address many sustainable development challenges.

In several of the Caribbean SIDS, there has been considerable economic expansion and social progress, and living standards have improved in a number of countries. However, the development constraints and the particular challenges faced by SIDS remain. They result, among other factors, from geographic isolation, narrow resource base or a small size of internal markets and economies. Hence, poverty is still persistent and underdevelopment still widespread in many parts of the Caribbean region.

The process of globalization continues to affect SIDS in many ways, often increasing their vulnerability. Nearly all of the Caribbean islands and their economies depend to a large degree on imported oil. World market prices have increased sharply, draining precious foreign exchange and making it even more difficult for companies based in SIDS to compete internationally. SIDS economies frequently lack diversification and depend on sectors such as tourism or agriculture – sectors where revenues are affected negatively by the exchange rate volatility that has prevailed during recent months.

Climate change also threatens the achievement of sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals. Islands are highly exposed to the impacts of climate change, particularly sea-level rise and extreme weather events. The geographic location of Caribbean SIDS places them in the path of severe storms. Every year, hurricanes and storms exact a punishing toll, in damaged infrastructure, destroyed crops, and human lives.

Islands naturally foster – and depend on – close trading and other links with their neighbours. It is therefore not surprising that regional integration is well advanced in the Caribbean. CARICOM and the various United Nations programmes and agencies play an important role in fostering this process.

Internationally, the cause of SIDS has benefited from a strong and unified stance of islands from different regions. The support of the Government of Iceland extends this solidarity to the North-South dimension.

This meeting is an important opportunity to expand inter-regional cooperation, share information and experience, and develop partnerships in a number of key areas of mutual interest. Among these are clean energy and energy efficiency, sustainable fisheries management and the fight against climate change.

The contribution of Caribbean SIDS to global greenhouse gas emissions is minor. Apart from doing their fair share, there are good reasons for SIDS to pursue clean and affordable sources of energy. Cleaner energy and energy efficiency technologies can strengthen energy security, improve urban air quality and bring benefits for human health. Thus approaching climate change from a sustainable development perspective yields positive outcomes for both the climate and development.

Many SIDS are actively pursuing renewable energy options, but still face formidable barriers, in terms of costs and technological capacities. International cooperation can play an important role in overcoming these barriers.

SIDS need access to both mitigation and adaptation technologies. In this respect, the Bali Action Plan underscores the importance of technology innovation and transfer for mitigating and adapting to climate change.

Capacity-building and the development and diffusion of technology are closely linked, because using and adapting technologies for local circumstances requires technical capacities and trained national personnel.

The full potential for the transfer, deployment and diffusion of climate mitigation and adaptation technology remains untapped. International technology cooperation and partnerships have yet to be fully utilized to accelerate the wide-ranging “win-win” transfer of technology for

promoting sustainable development and for addressing climate change. I understand that the Business and Investment Forum, which will take place as a part of this meeting, will explore perspectives for sustainable energy development, particularly based on geothermal energy sources, and for cooperation in sustainable fisheries development.

The marine environment is especially important for SIDS. As the global demand for fish products continues to soar, many important fisheries have collapsed or are under threat. Yet we know that sound management can support the sustainable harvesting of marine resources.

The sea can be a source of sustenance for island communities, a source of employment and a key attraction for the tourism industry. For SIDS, this could be an area for exchange of experiences, lessons learnt and technical assistance in the context of development cooperation.

The UN seeks to foster and facilitate partnerships and cooperative efforts as a vital tool in the collective response to pressing global problems. The focus of these partnerships is on implementation and practical action. With respect to climate change, partnerships can promote the cost-effective transfer of know-how, experience and equipment for mitigation and adaptation. We need the full range of partnerships: public-private, North-South, and South-South.

In closing, I would like to say that the UN and its Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) are committed to enhancing support for SIDS and strengthening international cooperation. I hope that that this meeting will advance international cooperation between Caribbean SIDS and other international partners.

I thank the Government of Iceland for its initiative in arranging this meeting, for its solidarity with small island development states, and for supporting multilateral cooperation within the United Nations framework.

I look forward to frank and stimulating discussions.

Thank you.

Closing remarks (26 March)

It gives me great pleasure to deliver these brief remarks at the closing of this High-Level Roundtable on International Cooperation for Sustainable Development in Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

The Roundtable Meeting and its various thematic sessions have given us the opportunity to address some of the key issues in the sustainable development of SIDS. An affordable energy supply and sustainable fisheries are, indeed, of crucial importance for the improvement of livelihoods in all of the Caribbean island economies.

I believe that our meeting has provided ministers, senior officials and policy makers, as well as participating business leaders, and energy and fisheries experts, an important opportunity to share information on their policies, development plans, and projects.

The challenges faced by SIDS are formidable, and still growing. However, as we have heard from the presenters, various initiatives are planned, or have already been undertaken, to modernize facilities, expand capacities, and enhance sustainable development in the energy supply systems and in fisheries in the Caribbean Sea region.

I was very interested to learn about the various options that have been identified for potential sustainable development cooperation. In several of the small island developing countries, the potentials for harnessing renewable energy sources seem particularly promising. There has also been a good discussion on the possibilities to enhance sustainable fisheries. Greater protection of the Caribbean Sea from all types of pollution will be of great importance.

It is encouraging to see that new project opportunities are being identified, and action is being taken at various levels, to make practical contributions to achieve sustainable development. The prospects for enhancing sustainable development are always greater where there is effective international development cooperation.

The adoption of the Conclusions and Recommendations of this High-level Roundtable is a considerable step towards achieving sustainable development goals. I welcome the envisaged new partnerships in sustainable energy development and in sustainable fisheries, which will certainly be beneficial for all partners involved.

In five weeks, the Commission on Sustainable Development will convene its 16th session in New York. The Commission will review global progress in implementing the intergovernmental decisions on agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification, and Africa. The proposed organization of work for CSD-16 also includes a SIDS day on the review of implementation of the Mauritius Strategy, in relation to the thematic cluster of issues; this will include discussion of energy and sustainable fisheries. The deliberations at the upcoming CSD can thus benefit directly from the outcome of this High-level Roundtable.

I would like to take this occasion to thank His Excellency, Mr Christopher Sinckler, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and International Business of Barbados, and Her Excellency, Ms. Ingibjörg Gísladóttir, Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Iceland, and all the other senior officials for their contributions to this event, and for taking the time to be here with us today.

Without the valuable cooperation and support from the Governments of Barbados and Iceland, this High-level Roundtable would not have taken place.

The United Nations and its Department of Economic and Social Affairs are ready to provide our expertise to facilitate the further follow-up and implementation of the conclusions and recommendations. DESA is also ready to play an active role in the work of the new partnerships.

My special thanks also go to Ms. Simone Rudder and to her entire professional team at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of this beautiful island country, and to Mr. Jon Jonasson at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iceland, who have spared no effort in the preparation and organization of this event, and in hosting the visiting delegations, with such outstanding generosity and hospitality.

I also wish to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to all the Ambassadors to the United Nations in New York, who have taken time from their other duties to attend and to support this event.

The active participation of the private sector in this meeting is also greatly appreciated. I encourage all of you to also take part in the Business and Investment Forum which will be held tomorrow morning.

I thank all participants for their contributions and I wish all of you every success in your work for the sustainable development of the Caribbean small island developing states.

Thank you.