

Opening Speech by

Rebeca Grynspan

UN Under-Secretary-General and UNDP Associate Administrator

at the

Inter-regional Preparatory Meeting for the

3rd International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

Monday, 26 August 2013

Bridgetown, Barbados

I thank the government of Barbados for the invitation to address you this morning and for graciously hosting this Meeting. Barbados has long been a champion for SIDS and a strong partner of the United Nations. I commend Prime Minister Stuart for continuing this tradition and thank him for his strong commitment to sustainable development, exemplified by his service on the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability last year.

These are exciting and trying times for those committed to sustainable development.

In Rio, member states recognized the scale of our challenges and agreed that environmental, social and economic objectives must be pursued simultaneously. The concept however - has yet to be put fully into practice – to turn promises into action.

As people everywhere suffers the consequences of rapid environmental degradation, climate change and growing inequalities, they look to world leaders to take decisive action to reduce poverty and put the world, once and for all, on a sustainable and equitable development path.

For people living in SIDS and many developing countries, the discussion is anything but theoretical. For many SIDS climate change is a matter of survival. Global inaction threatens lives, livelihoods and hard fought development gains.

UNDP offices on the ground experience with you the aftermaths of increasingly extreme weather, we understand climate change as a fundamental threat to every aspect of the development agenda. We have learnt from our work with all of you and understand that sustainable development is not AN option but the ONLY way forward.

I want to draw on this experience to suggest three opportunities going into the 3rd International Conference next year.

First, SIDS can use the Apia Conference to signal again that they won't wait for action but will continue to be effective leaders and role models, demonstrating in practice the change they want to see. The message to other leaders is clear and compelling - nobody should wait to do the right thing.

But SIDS cannot carry the burden of change alone! My second call is to make Apia a vehicle for global action. Increasing interdependence has made it obvious that unless action is taken at scale - the world's smallest and most vulnerable countries and people will increasingly bear the brunt of events outside their control.

Leaders in Rio agreed this was unjust and called for stepped up support for SIDS.

In Apia, SIDS can build on this agreement and the momentum going into 2015 - to help generate the financing, technology and support SIDS need and at the same time influence the post 2015 development agenda.

–Thirdly, Apia can help SIDS unite diverse actors around strategic initiatives that can trigger long-term sustainable development. As described in the Synthesis Report prepared

for this meeting,¹ supporting the “blue economy” could - for example - help SIDS carve a niche in the global economy while protecting and harnessing the oceans to develop fisheries, build tourism and identify new resources. The energy for all initiative and the SIDS DOCK Support program are also important examples for scaling up efforts and build collective action beyond the usual silos.

The leadership SIDS can again demonstrate in Apia is not new. SIDS are already world leaders in their commitments to cut 45 percent in emissions in the next 17 years that is considerably higher than the pledges of the world's richest countries². Dominica has the world’s most ambitious plans aiming to become carbon “negative” by 2020 and the Maldives plans to become carbon neutral by 2020.

¹ Synthesis Report of the three regional meetings held in preparation for the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States. Page 7.

² Data from UN study cited in the this Guardian article from May 2012 <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2012/may/10/small-island-states-clean-energy-race>

SIDS are also out ahead in terms of trilateral and South-South Cooperation. SIDS have much to teach each other and the world, about policies linking growth and social protection with initiatives to protect biodiversity and rebuild after disasters.

SIDS have made significant advances towards the MDGs in health, education, gender equality and water and sanitation. Barbados for example has achieved the majority of the MDG targets. But climate change, environmental degradation and economic volatility threaten to set progress back. A 2010 ESCAP review of Pacific SIDS found that the global economic crisis had pushed thousands into poverty - disproportionately children, women, older persons and those with disabilities³.

In your regional preparatory meetings, waste, pollution, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and biodiversity loss – were identified as growing threats to food security and sustainable

³ The 2010 PSIDS Five-year review of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the BPoA
http://www.sidsnet.org/msi_5/docs/regional/pacific/Pacific_Regional_Synthesis-MSI5-Final.pdf

livelihoods, growth opportunities, tourism and health. These are problems that SIDS in most cases - have done very little to cause and that exacerbate structural vulnerabilities on top of the normal challenges developing countries already face.

To generate the political commitment and international support needed to tackle these challenges, Apia will need to be far more than a review conference. UNDP, together with the Inter Agency Consultative Group is committed to supporting your preparations to realize - as called for by the General Assembly - an outcome that is “focused, forward-looking and action oriented”⁴.

The outcome of Rio+20 and the post 2015 development agenda offer an important frame.

⁴ Synthesis Report of the three regional meetings held in preparation for the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States. Page 1.

An unprecedented set of consultations has been carried out, over one million people have participated online and through close to 100 national consultations (13% of them SIDS).. They call for an agenda that eradicates extreme poverty and completes the unfinished business of the MDGs - while tackling environmental degradation and climate change.

The Secretary General's progress report released two weeks ago cites common ground on the need for a single development agenda that compels all countries to act to address the world's interlinked challenges. This suggests a framework with goals applicable to countries South & North – but with targets that reflect the different realities and abilities of countries and localities.

Apia can help SIDS build on this momentum by engaging citizens in this path breaking global conversation to influence the future development agenda – and by getting out ahead – setting concrete targets and systems for mutual accountability that can fit within the future framework.

We in UNDP are proud of our long standing partnership with SIDS and we are sincerely committed to supporting these important efforts building on the regional consultations and the lessons learnt from the Barbados Plan of Action and the Mauritius strategy.

I sincerely wish you productive deliberations and look forward to our interactions over the next few days.