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ON SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

Opening remarks
Inter-regional preparatory meeting
Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States

Bridgetown, Barbados, 26-28 August 2013

[dignitaries to be confirmed]

Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address the opening of the inter-regional preparatory meeting.

This meeting is a key milestone in our journey to Apia, Samoa. Building on the three regional preparatory events, this meeting will set forth the SIDS' visions and expectations for the outcome of the Conference in Samoa. It will also help to articulate your strategy for collaboration towards its successful outcomes.

Allow me to begin by thanking our generous hosts, the Government and people of Barbados. Their gracious hospitality, their leadership and commitment to the advancement of SIDS everywhere, is well noted and highly appreciated.

Nearly twenty years ago, Barbados hosted the first Global Conference on SIDS. The outcome of that Conference - the Barbados Programme of Action, along with the Mauritius Strategy adopted in 2005 - continues to guide the sustainable development of SIDS today.

As the three regional meetings have demonstrated, SIDS have made remarkable progress in sustainable development. This is thanks to leadership of SIDS themselves, and to global partnerships.

Indeed, your remarkable progress towards the MDGs bears testimony to the success of SIDS in achieving sustainable development.

However, the international community has recognized that SIDS are a special case for sustainable development because of the unique vulnerabilities they face. These vulnerabilities remain unaddressed.

To be successful, the third International Conference must tackle the vulnerabilities that hinder the long-term progress of sustainable development of SIDS.

SIDS have done much of the groundwork to prepare for the conference already. Through national consultations and other multi-stakeholder dialogues, Member States in all three regions have identified gaps in implementation, new and emerging challenges, and have highlighted SIDS priorities.

Last month, Jamaica, Fiji and Seychelles each hosted highly productive regional meetings, featuring vigorous interactive discussions and yielding strong, comprehensive outcomes.

From the three regional outcomes have emerged clear regional perspectives and characteristics, shared priorities and approaches.

While some region-specific themes were stressed, a strong and unified SIDS voice resonated throughout the regional meetings. I am confident that the same voice will ring through this meeting in Bridgetown.

Yours is a voice of conscience in international discourse. Indeed, your experiences are so often harbingers of what is to come for the world at large.

This is true especially in climate change. You are experiencing climate change first hand, day-by-day and season-by-season. You are also among the first to point out the security implications of climate change.

You are leading voices in the call for reforms in the international economic architecture, pointing out that GDP alone is an inadequate measure of a country's vulnerability, or its progress.

You are also raising your voices for sustainable energy. SIDS around the world are promoting renewable energy as a matter of necessity in the face of rising fossil fuel costs. These efforts are a testament to your far-sighted approach to sustainable development.

You are speaking with one voice and the message is clear: Our world will not be sustainable, if the SIDS are not sustainable.

The challenge is how to make the world listen to your voices and act in response, through partnership.

For this, the inter-regional meeting here in Bridgetown is essential. You have the chance to arrive at a unified position to share with development partners.

Just as the Conference in Samoa cannot be “business as usual”, so this inter-regional meeting must be innovative, focusing on practical and concrete actions.

The host countries of the regional meetings, the government of Barbados, and the government of Samoa have all expressed unequivocally that they want concrete deliverables and real change.

All three regional outcomes included targeted recommendations:

- on renewable energy,
- on the protection and sustainable development of the oceans,
- on structural changes to address the debt that slows the development of many SIDS,
- on curbing international organized crime and violence,
- on adaptation and mitigation of climate change, and preparedness for disasters.

So, for SIDS priorities to be addressed in an effective way, we need to tackle the implementation gaps and underlying vulnerabilities.

Meaningful partnerships – with a focus on institution building and an enhanced support framework for SIDS at the national, regional and international level – must play a central role.

Distinguished delegates,

International conferences often end with commitments to action. How can we make sure that commitments to be made at Samoa will be followed up on and implemented?

The key lies in the partnership for a shared destiny. Investments in SIDS are investments in the health of our planet, and in all of our peoples.

We should ask: Who benefits from cleaner air? Who benefits from a stabilized climate? Who benefits from an ocean that is unpolluted and teeming with life? SIDS do, of course, but so does every other country on the planet, developing and developed alike.

We could equally ask:

- Who benefits from expanded opportunities for young island people in this world of a mobile workforce?
- Who benefits from a society free of the scourge of international organized crime?
And
- Who benefits from initiatives to nurture the rich island culture and knowledge, in this age of instantaneous communication, and globalized markets for art and music?

Again, the answer is: SIDS do, but so does everyone else.

As Secretary-General of the 2014 SIDS Conference, it is my fervent hope that the international community hear these voices and make the appropriate choices.

With the SIDS leading the preparatory process, and with development partners and the United Nations system working together with you in close partnership, I am confident that the Conference in Samoa will meet the objectives set out in the General Assembly resolution. I am equally confident that it will fulfil the aspirations of the SIDS communities across the three regions.

We have a historic opportunity in Samoa. Let us reinvigorate our partnership. Let us deliver on our commitments to the peoples of small island developing States.

Let the results of the Conference be measured, not merely by the number of participants; but also by the number of concrete initiatives and pragmatic partnerships to be launched in Apia.

Let the Conference in Apia not be the end of the journey, but a new acceleration point. Let it inspire more action and propel – not just the SIDS – but the global community toward a sustainable future.

As Conference Secretary-General, I will do my utmost to support you. We will engage our colleagues in OHRLLS, Regional Commissions, Funds and Programmes, specialised agencies – indeed the UN system as a whole, as well as the SIDS regional organizations and Major Groups.

We will utilize our technical capacity to assist in the intergovernmental negotiations. In response to requests from SIDS, we will help organize substantive discussions, including on a framework for partnerships. We will help launch a global awareness campaign, putting a spotlight on the special case of SIDS. And we will work with the Host Government in finalising the logistical preparations for the Conference.

We will also harness the opportunity of the 2014 International Year of SIDS to rally global support for resilient SIDS.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The tagline for the 2014 SIDS Conference is “Island Voices, Global Choices.” This inter-regional meeting is *the* opportunity in the SIDS Conference preparatory process for the island voices to be heard together, as one, for you to make your case for the future you want.

I wish you well in your deliberations, and I thank you for raising your voices on behalf of all of us.
