

Statement by
H.E. Dr. John W. Ashe
President-elect of the 68th session of the UN General Assembly
to the
Interregional Preparatory Meeting
for the Third Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Conference
Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 August 2013

Honourable Prime Minister,
Distinguished Ministers,
Madam Chairperson of AOSIS,
Excellencies,
Colleagues,
Under-Secretary-General and Secretary-General of the SIDS Conference,
Associate Administrator of UNDP,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here with you for this fourth and final preparatory meeting for the Third Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Conference, to be held next year in Apia, Samoa.

It is indeed fitting that this meeting should be held in this country, the venue of the First SIDS Conference in 1994. The ties between Barbados and the concerns of SIDS are forever interlinked. And similarly to almost twenty-years ago, when I had the honour of serving as a Vice-President of the Conference, I would like to again thank the government and people of Barbados for agreeing to serve as host of this important meeting.

Way back in 1994, when some in this room were not yet born, the international community adopted what is still known as: The Barbados Programme of Action on SIDS. That blueprint was innovative then; and it is still innovative now. I therefore call on this meeting to be just as innovative, decisive and influential as you seek to adapt to the current realities facing SIDS.

Honourable Prime Minister,
Excellencies,

Your task here is clear: craft an outcome(s) that builds on those from the three regional preparatory meetings, in Jamaica, Fiji and Seychelles. It is my understanding that, at the technical level, work has already begun on this endeavour. In this regard, any outcome(s) should include the means of implementation –the how-to, if you will - for moving forward on SIDS-specific sustainable development goals in such areas as technology utilization, capacity-building, risk assessment, and increasing resilience.

With this in mind, permit me to recall some of the key areas of concern that have been highlighted in previous regional preparatory meetings and ask you to consider them in the context of means of implementation:

1) Blue economy. One of the defining elements of a SIDS is its relationship to the seas that surround it. Restoration of the health and vitality of the oceans, promotion of sustainable fishing practices, minimization of marine pollution, and the monitoring and subsequent response to ocean acidification are important areas of concern. Means of implementation – including in the form of partnerships – must be found to address these concerns.

2) Health, including non-communicable diseases and other illnesses. Disease burden is on the rise in SIDS; universal health coverage, as well as more regional cooperation, and increased outreach and research programmes in areas such as mental health, nutrition and disabilities, have been identified as pressing concerns.

3) Peace and security. Here I speak of organized crime, drugs and human trafficking, small arms and light weapons, piracy, counterfeit goods and political instability, among others. Support – including from each other – is needed to respond to these threats so that people feel safe and protected, and are able to fulfil their full potential.

4) Social development, including the role of women and youth. Gender equality and more opportunities for women and girls will enhance development gains. There is also recognition that our future is in the hands of youth and they must be invited to join the conversation on sustainable development. The collective task before you is how best to ensure that women and youth do become both agents and beneficiaries of development.

5) Financing. In order to achieve sustainable development goals, timely and reliable sources of financing will be critical. This includes aid from developed countries, foreign direct investment, new trade opportunities and innovative sources of financing, among others. In addition, countries will need to consider what options and strategies are available for reducing debt burdens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are no doubt aware, a number of processes are now underway at the United Nations that will culminate in a shared and universal development agenda in 2015. There are ongoing discussions on the acceleration of the Millennium Development Goals. There are a number of processes resulting from the Rio+20 Conference, including the Sustainable Development Finance Strategy; the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and the establishment of the High Level Political Forum. Finally, discussions continue on climate change within the UNFCCC.

As President of the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly, I am aware of the need to pull the best of these processes together and, with the help Member States, define the parameters for this new agenda.

This is a collective enterprise, which you, as your countries' representatives, will need to create entry points, and ensure that the needs of SIDS countries are duly acknowledged and addressed on the broader policy landscape. The opportunity to do so will become available during the various High-level events and thematic debates I have announced in my capacity as President of the 68th session of the General Assembly. I therefore urge you to come with your practical solutions, find places of complementarity, thereby ensuring that the SIDS agenda becomes firmly embedded in the UN's post-2015 Development Agenda.

Furthermore, 2014 has been designated as the International Year of Small Island Developing States, and I expect there will be even greater opportunities for engagement with and recognition of SIDS. If these opportunities are properly utilized, I envision the issues and concerns of SIDS gaining significant prominence in international policy fora in the year ahead.

As President of the 68th session of the General Assembly, I wish to assure you that I will always be standing in solidarity with you.

Colleagues,

It was the poet John Donne who said,

“No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.”

Of course, in this case, each SIDS *is* actually an island (which I'm sure Mr. Donne was not expecting). But you are also part of the main – a universal and common cause that transcends national identities and agendas.

Standing in that place, you are at your best, united in the quest to see your countries thrive and flourish as beacons of sustainable development.

Thank you.