



Statement of H.E. Ambassador Collin Beck of the Solomon Islands, on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), regarding Land

16th Meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development 7 May 2008

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Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of AOSIS and associate this statement with the statement by Antigua & Barbuda on behalf of the G77.

Land issues are of critical importance to the AOSIS, as we face very complex land management issues.

Competing land uses include economic development, water management, subsistence agricultural production, biodiversity conservation, addressing climate change impacts and forestry. How can we address so many issues within such limited time?

Chairman,

Small island and low-lying coastal states are among those most vulnerable to climate change impacts, including sea level rise. Climate change impacts create serious development challenges triggering migrating movement away from low-lying ancestral land, threatening the stability in some SIDS, including posing a threat to fragile land tenure systems. In some SIDS, social competition for vulnerable resources, such as food, water and land itself, poses an undeniable barrier to reaching many of our shared development goals, including those in the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation, the Barbados Plan of Action and the Johannesburg Plan of Action.

We seek not only assistance in our own land management programs to address our vulnerability, but also seek the commitment of member states to link their global GHG commitments and land management practices.

Over 100 UN member states already have environmental impact assessment laws; these and existing other localized land-use tools can be better and further studied by UN agencies, including UN Habitat, UNDP and UNEP, to for their potential to address climate issues. Global efforts to meet the challenges of implementation are clearly inadequate, the UN needs to take a more proactive role in facilitating dialogue between land use planners and climate change experts.

For our member states, land conservation and coastal conservation must work hand-in-hand to protect areas vulnerable to climate impacts, including coastal erosion. We also seek global recognition and increased support for our innovative conservation programs, including national efforts as well as intergovernmental region programs such as the Micronesia Challenge, the Coral Triangle and the Caribbean Challenge.

Chairman,

We note that access to land is a constraint in many SIDS. We believe that the provision of land rights through long term leases of freehold titles will provide security of tenure and allow the poor to leverage

financing for farm development and food production. However, any efforts to improve land tenure must also analyze and respect traditional cultural ownership systems in certain member states, including evaluating the potential positive benefits of traditional cultural land systems for community-based development.

Chairman,

As our urban areas grow, and available land is diminished, we are also losing the ability to produce our traditional food sources. Our urban infrastructure, which relies on our inherently limited resources and geographies, is severely challenged to meet increasing demand. We need international assistance in integrating urban growth, rural food sources, land use and sustainable growth - with an increased focus on the unique challenges facing our member states.

We consider land use planning essential to the optimal utilization of scarce land resources. In this regard, land information and mapping systems technologies can play a key role in providing sound land use plans to guide land use decisions. Access to these technologies will assist small island and coastal low-lying states in enhancing food security, agricultural production and rural livelihoods by guiding the most suitable agricultural land uses on the most productive lands. We also note the overlap between our land use activities, and the complex challenges of desertification, drought and land degradation. We also seek greater assistance from funding bodies, including the Global Environmental Facility, to facilitate SIDS access to financial and technological resources which address land degradation in an integrated approach.

Chairman,

With limited resources, land use practices for many of our member states must also include increased international commitment and cooperation regarding our sustainable forestry goals.

The international community must better assist us to increase the awareness, creation and enforcement of national legislation to ensure sustainable rotational logging practices and replanting initiatives, as well as stakeholder participation, and action plans to address deforestation and sustainable forestry.

We note that the Kyoto Protocol rewards countries that re-forest and afforest after degrading their forests, but potentially penalizes countries that have encouraged conservation or sustainable forestry. We call for increased international recognition of the long-standing conservation practices of many of our member states.

To assist us in achieving global sustainable use goals regarding land management, the international community must assist our member states to improve national capacity for policy and legislation formulation, negotiations with transnational corporations and evaluation of mineral sector projects— this includes improving environmental impact assessment practices, as well as legal compliance, rehabilitation, and compensation programs. We also note the need, regarding the mining sector, for increased assistance to SIDS and low-lying coastal areas to establish fair and transparent compensation systems that fully compensate for all natural resource loss, environmental damage, and socio-cultural effects – on both a monetary and non-monetary basis.

Chairman,

Many AOSIS members have limited land resources, and, as a related and cross-cutting issue, limited access to water sources, including groundwater. Water in the soil is diminishing considerably, and access to water methods, including desalination and reverse osmosis, is a burden on our economies and limited energy capacity. For archipelagic SIDS, implementation of these solutions has been limited to only the

more densely populated islands, and not without government subsidies. Our groundwater sources also risk contamination from sea level rise. Effective land management practices, including land conservation, increased vegetative cover, pollution prevention and reforestation, have been pursued by SIDS as a means of addressing water management, long before our present focus on climate change. Greater international assistance is needed to further implement and develop our land management strategies which address water security, while also integrating competing economic development pressures.

Thank you.