

SAMOA



STATEMENT BY

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SAMOA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

TO THE

**SIXTEENTH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

AT THE

**COMMEMORATION OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES
"SIDS DAY"**

New York, 12 May 2008

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Madam Chairperson,

Coming to the CSD session today, one was tempted to conclude that maybe man and nature had conspired to prevent the SIDS Day from taking place. Today's rough weather is in stark contrast to yesterday's.

But then yesterday was Mothers Day, a day to celebrate the wholeness and selfless contributions our mothers make to our families, our nations and to the world. Its significance is not because our mothers had asked to be acknowledged this way; rather, it is in our ready and collective willingness to honor them, because they deserve such recognition, and much more.

Mother's Day will remain therefore a permanent feature of our yearly activities.

Why?

Because it has meaning and relevance to our families, it is imbedded in our customs and traditions, there is religious reverence to it, some governments have legitimized it, and through commercialization, its permanency is assured.

Madam Chairperson,

I wish I can say the same of our SIDS Day.

Previous speakers have lamented the sad demise of today's SIDS Day – with the review of water and sanitation, equally critical areas for our island countries, running in parallel with our SIDS Day. The Chairman of AOSIS has offered a draft decision which in reality is a "re-statement" of what had already been promised previously to SIDS. If another decision by the Commission is what it takes to give us a dedicated and an exclusive full day for a frank and honest review of the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation, then Samoa supports the taking of such action.

Madam Chairperson,

The Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation are well crafted intergovernmental agreements that have the zeal and stamp of approval of the UN membership. That SIDS is a UN recognized group with special needs and inherent vulnerabilities, is a given. The interwoven challenges confronting SIDS are a matter of common knowledge within the halls of the UN, and hardly needs repeating. The SIDS issues, and the many professed solutions to overcome them, are some of the most debated and over-researched topics within the UN. Despite all these, meaningful and substantive progress by most SIDS continues to be an illusive and evasive goal.

Earlier speakers had spoken of the mismatch in the real needs of SIDS and their share of international resources to make good on some of their populations basic aspirations.

Part of the dilemma we continually face is the misconception that our challenges are minuscule in comparison to the needs of other special groups and regions and that our one and only concern is climate change.

Nothing can be further from the truth. With respect, both in relative and absolute terms, some problems faced by these groups pale in comparison to what our countries are subjected to on a daily basis. Moreover, while the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation were negotiated agreements amongst the UN member states, unfortunately there were no corresponding dedicated SIDS Fund or pool of resources from which to progress and implement the MSI. A lot was left to the goodwill of individual member states.

Unfortunately, there are some amongst us who continue to be in a state of self-denial about the legitimacy of the SIDS claim as a group with insurmountable vulnerability, not by their choice but by factors completely outside of their control.

But all is not lost.

Some of our development partners, traditional and new, have reached out to help us. What they have in common is trust and respect for our views and needs. Bilaterally, regionally and internationally, they are partnering with SIDS to overcome some of the constraints imposed by limited land and narrow natural resources bases, isolation and downward agricultural production, sustained food security for our expanding populations, and the need to provide a meaningful existence for our people and communities in the rural areas.

Obviously we need more countries that are prepared to take a "leap of faith" during the MSI's lifetime in the clear knowledge that while the SIDS might seem an inconsequential group to some within the UN architecture, when the dust finally settles down, we all belong to the same global family where our future and actions are inevitably intertwined, and where SIDS challenges and problems should also be their challenges and problems, and yours, ours and mine.

Madam Chairperson,
Charity begins at home.

Let me finish by suggesting a modest but pragmatic approach. SIDS themselves should be prepared to lead and own the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation. Together with the specific entities within the UN Secretariat entrusted to advocate and champion SIDS causes, they should be more proactive and assertive. Jointly, they should re-position themselves to engage better in a more effective and visible partnership.

What is lacking is a "Human face of SIDS" to every issue that comes before the UN, be it in security, human rights, climate change, development, gender, indigenous issues or whatever. That way, SIDS issues are at the forefront, remain topical, considered, debated and actioned daily, weekly and monthly and not conveniently set aside to be discussed only when we have another SIDS Day in two years time. I say this because there are some who would like us to believe that SIDS is synonymous with climate change and as long as the issues are not climate-related, then maybe; just maybe, our lot is a happy and content one.

Time for rhetoric is over. Let us own up to our respective responsibilities and be the catalyst to bring about real changes to the lives of the SIDS people for whom today's event is all about.

Thank you.