Statement

by

Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu,
Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries,
Landlocked Developing Countries and
Small Island Developing States

Briefing to AOSIS

Friday 20 October 2017
10:00 AM
Conference Room 12, UN Secretariat, New York
Statement for the High Representative and Under-Secretary General of OHRLLS for her meeting with the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), 20 October 2017

Excellency - Ambassador Naseer

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen,

and above all friends and fellow islanders

First and foremost, my appreciation goes to you Ambassador Naseer as Chair of AOSIS

I must thank you for organising this important meeting.

In my capacity as the Secretary-General’s High Representative but also as a fellow islander, I could not have looked more forward to meeting you all.

If AOSIS was not already created, our times certainly would need AOSIS. So, I also wish to thank you, Ambassador for your strong leadership of AOSIS.

AOSIS is a major negotiating force for UN processes from the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction to the Addis Ababa Agreement on Financing for Development; from the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

It is by speaking with a united voice that the Alliance has made great strides.

It is your being ONCE VOICE that has ensured that the outcomes from these major UN Conferences explicitly recognise the complexity small island developing states are confronted with.

I just returned some hours ago from an international meeting on mainstreaming the SDGs at local level, and attended by 85 countries in Cabo Verde where, on behalf of H.E. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, I strongly stated that not only must we leave no one behind but we also must leave no place behind! If we want to achieve the climate change and 2030 goals we as international community have set ourselves.

As has been said before, the SIDS may too often be seen as small island states but they are big ocean states.

So, I am encouraged by the strong focus on SIDS during the recent Ocean Conference for the implementation of SDG 14.

Island nations know how from oceans, to land, to air we can not separate issues and must tackle their linkages, their complexity at once in the interest of peoples.

It truly is: Leave no one behind and leave no place behind.
As your High Representative, and with the full support of my Office, you can count on the continued if not enhanced engagement I wish to have with and FOR you.

I pledge our support in the follow-up and monitoring processes of the global agreements with the UN system. We also must work together to build synergy and coherence between the SAMOA Pathway and the various key agreements we have reached since.

You as member states have asked OHRLLS to be an advocate for you and support the most vulnerable countries in the world.

OHRLLS serves 91 member states of which 38 are SIDS. I let you do the maths.

Allow me to very briefly sum up what OHRLLS’s mandate is - a mandate YOU gave OHRLLS through General Assembly resolution 56/227 establishing OHRLLS in 1991.

The key mandate of the Office lies in advocacy, mobilising the entire capacity of the UN system through inter-agency collaboration and support to resource mobilisation for the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation.

The SAMOA Pathway expanded the mandate of the Office to now include mainstreaming of the SAMOA Pathway in the work of the UN system and enhance the coherence of SIDS issues in the UN processes, including at the national, regional and global levels.

And then most recently, in 2015, the General Assembly through its resolution, called upon OHRLLS together with UNDESA to support the work of the Steering Committee which has been set up to monitor and review the SIDS partnerships announced during the SIDS Conference in Samoa.

I do not have to tell you the challenges SIDs face in their pursuit of sustainable development. In my previous professional lives, I dare say, I have dealt extensively with these and can say with conviction that these challenges, and high up on the agenda is the climate change challenge, are only growing by the day.

I am also not here today to just talk in general terms or words you may already have heard before.

I wish to share a couple proposals on how we could enhance our working together.

As your High Representative, I wish to give you all my assurances that I personally will place high priority on working with you and I have instructed my office to generally focus more on forging strong UN system-wide collaboration through the inter-agency consultative group (IACG) for SIDS.
I see this as a means to support you to leverage the UN system capacities and to notch up seamless coordination, collaboration and coherence within the UN system in support of SIDS.

As a very first step, I am pleased to share with you that the IACG has adopted its Terms of Reference in its last meeting in September this year.

Next, I wish to focus on promoting much stronger linkages between national, regional and global levels. As they say and as I have said already in different fora: think globally and act locally.

What I wish to propose to you is to establish a network of SIDS national focal points. Why?

I believe from my own experiences that this could help to coordinate the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway with all other relevant stakeholders at all levels and hopefully accelerate implementation.

It is my view that greater engagement between my office with those who actually work on the ground, those who know the daily realities, those who know there are no one size fits all solutions is key to the successful implementation of the SAMOA Pathway, the achievement of the SDGs and the climate change goals we agreed on.

Such system of national level focal points is well established and works well with the 47 member states of the Least Development Group (LDC) group.

This year, we organised the LDC focal points meeting during the High Level Political Forum. This also enabled participants to attend some of the Forum’s main sessions and I hope we can do the same for SIDS.

Let us be honest, it is not at a New York desk that one knows what you are confronted with on the ground.

I will follow this initiative up with formal communication, inviting the nomination of an appropriate National Focal Point representative from each of the AOSIS Group.

A further concern of mine are the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit following their review of the support provided by the UN system to SIDS. These are useful recommendations and we ought to act on them.

I have heard it loud and clear: your concern is that we strengthen coordination of activities between OHRLLS and the DESA SIDS Unit.

Since I took up office a few months ago, and while efforts are already underway, I place very high priority on the need that OHRLLS and DESA take concrete steps to institutionalise our collaboration.

The goal is to ensure better coordination and planning of work in support of SIDS. Some of the concrete steps include: alternate chairing arrangement of the IACG and joint preparation of side events at global conferences, joint organisation and issuing
joint invitations co-signed by myself and the DESA USG to events for improved transparency in communication with Member states.

OHRLLS and DESA also continue jointly to render support to the Steering Committee on the Partnership for SIDS I think we can do more but I wish to listen a bit more to you in this regard.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, friends

Allow me to now turn to an update on some of the activities that my Office has undertaken this year and brief you on some of our planned activities.

During the year, we organized in close collaboration with partners and Member States various important events including: in the margins of the, 2017 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Cancun in May, the Ocean Conference in June, the GA High-Level week in September.

Out of all of these events it became even more clear that we must manage cross-cutting themes from resilience building to access to finance, promoting partnerships in areas such as renewable energy to sustainable fisheries and climate change.

And this is not all!

Last week, I attended the World Bank Group’s Small State Roadmap launch during the annual Small State Forum in Washington DC. This week, I engaged with a very important meeting held in and by Cabo Verde on the local dimension of sustainable development.

At the World Bank meetings, we welcomed the increased attention accorded to issues of small states in this annual forum.

This attention now must be maintained.

My office will continue to closely work with the World Bank and others in supporting efforts to identify and operationalize metrics of vulnerability.

This is strategic to facilitate access to concessional finance and development finance for SIDS.

We really must work on access to finance and attendant support to capacity-building to access that finance. We have organised a briefing for the three groups of countries in December with representatives from the World Bank and its other agencies in New York. We will be in contact on any special topics which the AOSIS group wishes to be covered in that briefing session, so we can also set aside a specific time for that aside from main group session. We understand that the World Bank will also use that opportunity to briefly touch upon a Taxation Summit which will take place in early 2018.
We have also sent out a notice to all of the three groups of countries inviting participation at a briefing session with the WTO on the 10th November here in NY.

In Cabo Verde, I stressed the need to much more closely pay attention to engage local communities in implementing climate change and agenda 2030 goals and invest in local development.

We must make more strides also on the OHRLLS advocacy role.

Presently, OHRLLS works on a publication on international support to SIDS for the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the SDGs.

We hope this will be of value-added to your efforts and the study will be published early next year.

We live in a world where nobody can go or do it alone.

We must promote and invest more in genuine and durable partnerships for SIDS.

As your High Representative and with the support of my office, I am committed to pursuing the work carried out in the context of the small island developing States global business network.

This valuable online platform and resource hub really ought to connect the national and regional SIDS private sectors, global businesses and other relevant stakeholders.

The platform has already been instrumental in encouraging exchange of best practices and lessons learned and peer-learning among SIDS to SIDS. It also has greatly contributed to connecting SIDS with the global community.

We can see how it has led to enhanced collaboration among regional private sector organisations, namely the Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation and the Caribbean Export Development Agency.

Next week, together with the Government of Vanuatu, we will hold a two-day Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting for LDCs on leveraging investment in broadband for national development.

Connectivity is a key issue for the implementation of the 2030 goals. This work is also linked to that of the Broadband Commission for which I am a member, and where I chair the Working Group on Vulnerable countries.

Just think how tele-medicine, education, exchange of knowledge on climate change, exchange of knowledge on sustainable agricultural practices, easy warning systems benefit from connectivity at all levels of society.

Given that access to broadband and issues of connectivity remain a key challenge for SIDS, I believe this is an important meeting and I am happy to share with you that we managed to secure funding to extend the invitation to all SIDS in the region regardless of their LDC status.
In the margins of the meeting, we will hold an Expert Group Meeting on harnessing opportunities for enhanced connectivity in SIDS. The Report from the meeting along with the recommendations from the experts will be available to the public later this year.

The outcomes of the meeting in Vanuatu will also feed into the work of the Working Group on developing a global policy document on broadband and connectivity for the vulnerable countries.

Together with DESA, AOSIS and the COP23 President of Fiji we will host a meeting on Loss and Damage and the 2030 Agenda in Bonn on 16 November.

Climate change is such a key issue for the SIDS.

We still grieve for our sisters and brothers affected by this year’s extraordinarily devastating hurricane season in the Caribbean.

We can not stress enough the importance of enhancing action and support to address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, these extreme weather events and slow onset events.

The destruction across the Caribbean islands caused by Hurricane Irma and Maria must serve all of the global community as a stark reminder of just how fragile SIDS are to exogenous shocks that are beyond their control. These events also impact the SIDS so so much more given the size, geographic position of SIDS, their transport issues and thus these extreme events really destroy in disproportionate ways peoples lives.

The Secretary-General during his visit to Dominica said it loud and clear - never had he seen such scale of destruction.

We must all work together to strengthen the mechanism of support to SIDS. A very personal concern of mine is to support you in enhancing access to climate finance.

The area of data and statistics is one where there are common challenges in its availability and collation for all countries, and particularly so for the three groups of vulnerable countries. I have been asked by the Paris 21 Group to be a champion for statistics for the SIDs countries. I will report of the developments in this role, after attending the meeting in Paris in April next year.

Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen, friends

This already is the third year of implementing the SAMOA Pathway, two years have gone by since we adopted the SDGs.

I am deeply convinced that we must accelerate our efforts and we must work more closely together. It is what we owe this and future generations.
As you know, we have programmed a one-day high-level review implementation of the SAMOA Pathway for September 2019.

This mid-term review is a tremendous opportunity beyond just reviewing progress in implementation.

I urge you all, let us together find out key challenges in implementation. We must address emerging issues and chart a path forward for the next five years.

I think this takes a well thought through preparatory process. That process must be inclusive, have the participation of all of you and must address issues in a comprehensive way.

I count on your full participation!

As your High-Representative but also as your fellow islander, I reiterate my commitment to the SIDS and your peoples.

We stand ready to support AOSIS important role as the main and united negotiating voice on behalf of the SIDS.

We stand ready to provide substantive support to the Chair and we stand ready to provide any assistance that the AOSIS Group might seek from us.

Thank you and I very much look forward to listening to your views and hope for our strong collaboration in the years to come so that together we turn words of intent to reality for the peoples of the SIDS.