



Remarks

by

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Under-Secretary-General

High Representative

for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries

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at a high-level breakfast reception organised by UNDP, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the European Commission, and the UNFCCC COP23 Presidency – the Government of the Republic of Fiji

‘Small Island Developing States responding to climate impacts and planning for sustainable future. Leadership, Innovation and Partnership’

18 September 2017, New York from 8:00 - 9:15 AM

UN Secretariat, Delegates’ Dining Room (4th floor), West Terrace

United Nations Headquarters, New York

His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Asim, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Maldives,

His Excellency, Mr. Inia Seruiratu, High-Level Climate Champion and Fijian Minister for Agriculture

UNDP Administrator, and colleague Achim Steiner,

Excellencies

Ms. Yvon Slingenberg, European Commission Director on Climate Action,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

The topic of our meeting today is more than timely. Mr. Prime Minister, first as a fellow islander, I wish to extend my personal and OHRL's full solidarity with your government and your people and all Caribbean islands left so devastated by the unprecedented violence and destruction of Hurricane Irma. For the first time in 300 years, Barbuda is left without its people.

I wish to thank the organizers and especially my colleague Achim Steiner for bringing us together on such a vitally important topic, not just to discuss today, but to also act on it. We all need to join as partners to build the forward looking sustainable future of SIDs and their peoples.

SIDs are a lot more than being small island developing countries. As someone said: "the island states are large ocean nations holding the resources vital to the sustainability of our common humanity. Their fate is our common humanity's fate."

While we have a myriad of agreements in place, already alluded to by previous speakers, and while progress is being made, I posit that there is no room for

complacency. Our thinking and action, must move from reacting or responding each time crisis hits to pro-active prevention behavior.

Just a few figures from a recent World Bank report on Climate Change and Disaster Resilience Financing indicate how urgent pro-active stance is: over the past 16 years, more than 335 natural disasters struck SIDs, with direct damage estimated at 22.7 billion. Only 14% of aid to SIDs goes to climate change and natural disasters.

Aid too often consists of a diverse array of small projects. This and daunting norms of international finance when you are a small government draws heavily on the management capacities. Just from my past career, I could give you numerous examples where heavy, complex disbursement procedures literally takes away scarce capacities or in some cases, has meant that governments had to forgo access to financing.

Achim, you already said it: the SIDs have shown tremendous leadership in and on climate change and we all need their continued strong leadership.

Let us also be inspired by the leadership and courage of the late Hon. Tony de Braum of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, who was so instrumental to the COP21. And he said so poignantly for his beloved nation, and I quote “We’re suffering the result of climate change and the nuclear legacy, and we had nothing to do with either. You can either do it slowly with climate change, or you press a button and blow it up. And neither is justified. (End of quote).

So let us commit here and let us recommit in strong terms at COP 23 that together we will show the leadership, and innovation and partnership that are the building blocks to move to a sustainable future.

Ladies and gentlemen, how can we in the UN system and our partners support your efforts in planning for that sustainable future through leadership, innovation and partnership. I wish to share three thoughts

First, finance and capacity building: Climate finance for SIDS has grown steadily over the past decade but from a low base. I posit that we need faster and also more innovative finance and we need more focus on capacity building.

It is estimated that SIDS face a funding gap of USD 1 billion annually for adaptation needs. SIDS account for roughly 16% of the Green Climate Fund disbursed funds to date. We would hope that this Fund shows the potential to become a larger source of finance for SIDS.

SIDS indeed face the challenge of navigating a complex global architecture of funds as I already stated. There must be greater direct access to financing from global sources of funds, and priority should be given to capacity building and streamlined application procedures for SIDS.

The actions now taken by the Green Climate Fund to scale up funding for readiness programmes and support direct access through “enhanced” direct access modalities constitute useful steps forward.

Further, several SIDS have lost access to multilateral concessional funding because they exceeded income thresholds, and some have moved in and out of eligibility over time. This issue needs to be addressed to reflect the reality that - for SIDS, the main development challenge is vulnerability to external factors beyond domestic control.

In this regard, OHRLLS is a full-fledged actor of the World Bank-led Small States Forum (SSF). OHRLLS is a member of the working group discussing the design of potential vulnerability metrics that could serve as allocation criteria for concessional financing. These proposed vulnerability metrics will

be submitted for consideration by the World Bank' Board and will inform IDA19 negotiations. The result of this initiative, it is our hope, is enhanced access to development finance for SIDS.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Second we witness rapid advances in science, technology and innovation, and it is vital that SIDS are able to leverage know how and building up of capacities, new technologies like digital medicine, resilient infrastructure, emerging innovative finances in order to achieve sustainable development. For example, the new technology bank for LDCs that was approved by the General Assembly in December last year is to improve the LDCs scientific research and innovation base, promote networking amongst research institutions and assist LDCs to access and utilize critical and appropriate technologies.

My third and last thought is on the importance of Partnerships and this has been emphasized in the SAMOA pathway, and followed up with various actions including the establishment of the Steering Committee on Partnerships for SIDS. As we look ahead, we must continue to forge stronger partnerships, with all stakeholders in support of resilience building in SIDS.

Yes, we live at a time of multiple, complex and extremely rapid change. We also live at a moment of extraordinary advances in science, technology and innovation. SIDS should not remain entrapped in a vicious circle of vulnerability and low developmental outcomes, but should be supported on a virtuous cycle of high growth, sustained social progress and robust resilience against human induced disasters and beneficial assimilation to the global economy.

Let us show the political will to move forward together and I pledge to you that we stand ready to support you in advocacy and forging the strong partnerships it

will take to build sustainable futures for the benefit of our and future generations.

Thank you.