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United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

Opening Remarks

Fekita ‘Utoikamanu
High Representative
and
Under-Secretary-General
Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

Fourth Meeting of the SISRI Practitioners’ Network
Bringing Resilience to Scale in SIDS
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Geneva, Switzerland
Thank you, Madam Moderator. 
Hon Minister McKenzie 
Madame Mizutori, Special Rep of SG for Disaster Risk Reduction, 
Ms Julie Dana, World Bank 

SIDS Practitioners, 
Excellencies, 
Colleagues and friends 
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is an important meeting and it is very important to me to be with you. 

Bringing resilience to scale in small island developing States (SIDS) sure is a challenge but one we must take up with urgency. 

The very physical and human geography of the SIDS is such that not only they are among the most vulnerable but also those most at risk of being left far behind in the implementation of the major global agreements on disaster risk reduction, climate change and sustainable development. 

Theirs are unique characteristics and challenges demanding specific and also fast-tracked support. 

This too is the primary goal of the SAMOA Pathway. 

The SAMOA pathway is essentially a forerunner, a blueprint for the sustainable development of SIDS and dovetails with the broader context of the 2030 Agenda. 

Then, we have the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement and their provisions which we can only meet if we fully implement the SAMOA Pathway. 

That said, this is overall a critical year for the SIDS. 

This September, world leaders will gather at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to attend a series of Summits and High-level meetings. All of these meetings have a shared aim: lead to ambitious action to end poverty, respond to the climate threat and secure healthy, peaceful and prosperous lives for all. The message is simple: we must act NOW. 

These meetings include the Secretary-General’s Climate Action Summit, the SDG Summit, a High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development, and last but by no means least the High-Level Mid-Term Review of the SAMOA Pathway. 

The way life, our planet work is not a way of neat separate packages to be considered in isolation. No, and at the risk of sounding simplistic, but it all is interconnected!
So, it is very important that every effort is made to enhance the synergies between these meetings. It is very important that we ensure that SIDS issues are brought to the forefront in these key processes just as we did once at the Barbados conference!

To be able to do that, it is critical for the SIDS to have a robust Mid Term Review of the SAMOA Pathway.

This review ought to have substance, ought to be forward-looking with practical and practicable recommendations for action.

I cannot stress enough how important it is for us all together to set a proper course for action over the next phase of implementation.

The regional and inter-regional preparatory meetings for the Mid-Term Review of the SAMOA Pathway took place last year.

In all of these meetings, a strong focus on disaster risk reduction and building resilience emerged.

The very geography of SIDS means that disaster losses experienced by SIDS tend to be disproportionate. This continues to be a major and growing concern.

As predicted a long time ago, we are observing increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.

A single hurricane can and has erased years if not decades of development gains in many of these countries.

Disaster losses are putting vulnerable countries on an unequal footing – In 2018, the average external debt in SIDS reached 60% of their GNI, exacerbated by the need to borrow for the cost of natural disasters recovery.

As a side remark, when you are an island, just the transport costs to secure basic building materials can be prohibitive and I will not even mention time delays involved in securing basics!

This deprives SIDS of the already scarce resources that could be more usefully spent in areas such as quality education, health and infrastructure. These all are vital to eradicating extreme poverty, and ensuring more resilient, productive and peaceful societies.

Indeed, one of the key outcomes of the preparatory process of the Mid-Term Review was the recognition of the need for greater support for SIDS.

We must invest much more in knowledge, capacity and financial support to help them build back better after natural disasters.
Capacity building must include advancement of policies and strategies capable of addressing the financial management of disaster risk in SIDS.

The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, and more specifically this SISRI meeting, will allow us to drill down into these issues.

I hope for constructive dialogue on how to address these key dimensions of resilience building for SIDS.

In this way, we can have a sound basis for our discussions in the broader sustainable development context on areas including: tackling poverty, achieving food security and debt sustainability, building resilient infrastructure, ensuring resilient human settlements and strengthening adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and disasters.

OHRLLS looks forward to our discussions.

OHRLLS is deeply committed to ensuring that these matters are given the prominence they deserve as the peoples of the SIDS deserve nothing less from us!

These all are issues to tackle in the context of the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway, and in the implementation of the broader 2030 sustainable development agenda.

So, let us all rally as partners to ensure we leave no one behind!

Thank you.