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Statement

by

Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu

High Representative

for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States

at the

Launch of a

COVID-19 Multi-sectoral Response Plan

And Funding Appeal for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean

6th May 2020 at 2.00pm

Your Excellencies,
The Right Hon. Gaston Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua & Barbuda;
The Right Hon. Allen Chastanet, Prime Minister of St Lucia;
The Right Hon. Santia Bradshaw – Acting Prime Minister of Barbados;
Mr Didier Trebuq, RC Barbados and Eastern Caribbean UN
Ladies & Gentlemen

I am happy to join you and especially because this is the very first COVID 19 Appeal of this nature that supports SIDS.

It is great, it is above all encouraging to see the leadership of the governments involved and supported by your partner, the UN Team.

I want to give a hand to the UN Sub Regional Team having shown how responding as One to the COVID-19 response can be done and must be done.

Everybody, everywhere is touched by COVID 19.

But how we as individuals and societies go through this pandemic and respond to it varies greatly and the situation of SIDS is especially complex.

It would greatly help if life were a one dimension undertaking ! Well, it is not, it is complex and multi-dimensional as we say in our jargon. So, I welcome that the proposed Plan is grounded in that multi-dimensional perspective. It is the only way to go. It mirrors the UN's global response in addressing the immediate needs but also the long-term consequences through a mutually reinforcing three-pillar approach: humanitarian, health and socio-economic interventions.

As far as I can think back, only one other lived experience comes to my mind where SIDS were existentially worried if a then not understood virus could literally wipe out their populations - that was when we learnt about the HIV virus. So far SIDS have managed to contain severe outbreaks but the social and economic costs are likely to exceed anything we may have projected.

SIDS do face very very special circumstances ranging from remoteness to small population bases to fragile often single products driven economies. We

know that but once more these specific and complex factors SIDS have to manage require fast, adequate and major support.

As an example, tourism globally has flatlined and is projected to remain so for months to come. Yet, for many SIDS this is a key source of employment and income with tourism comprising more than 50% of GDP.

Many SIDS lack access to existing windows for concessional finance, despite their well-established vulnerabilities. SIDS have therefore called for a dedicated SIDS specific funding facility; as well as to open up access to all SIDS. Given the stress on the global financial system, how will this play out for SIDS?

SIDS are not in many instances equipped with the robust preventive and curative health systems this challenge demands, and how will they compete in a globally stressed market for the supply of PPE or medications?

Some SIDS do not generate income due to the global shutdown, while creditors continue to claim payment. These costs compete with nurses, cleaners and other essential workers in the middle of a global crisis. Just as some G20 countries called for African debt relief, we need to consider this urgently for SIDS. In this context, I draw your attention to our SG's framework for debt relief "Debt and COVID-19: A global response in solidarity" and his engagement with International Financial Institutions.

The needs for SIDS are urgent.

If they are not addressed now with urgency the likely result will be longer term poverty and hardship for many - in particular combined with climate change, natural disasters and other shocks - none of this pauses as a result of COVID-19. This means, the SIDS and their peoples will be left behind as far as the SAMOA Pathway implementation as well as the Agenda 2030 and its goals are concerned. We cannot allow for this to happen. The time to act is now.

The SIDS cannot go this alone and I hope you find the UN as your trustworthy, competent and loyal partner as we have done so throughout many decades. But it is time to call on all development partners to pledge

contributions to the Eastern Caribbean MRP Appeal. Your firm commitment to the SIDS is needed more than ever and is needed now.

As I said earlier, everybody, everywhere is touched by this unprecedented pandemic of our 21st century. This is a time for global solidarity, in particular with the most vulnerable countries - we cannot afford to leave them behind and let inequality grow even further.

We need your support to address the SIDS unique challenges and situation.

Thank You.