

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Tuiloma Neroni Slade
Permanent Representative of Samoa to the United Nations
on Behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)
at the Second Session of CSD 10 Acting as the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on
Sustainable Development**

**General Debate
New York, 1 February, 2002**

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of 43 countries. All are members of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), thirty-seven of which are members of the United Nations.

First, let me say that we agree with and align ourselves with the statement by the Chairman of the Group of 77 and China. We share, in particular, the concerns of developing countries about implementing Agenda 21, and the need for intensified efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

The political commitment and direction provided by Agenda 21 and the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) for the sustainable development of small island States (SIDS), and in their subsequent reviews, have been used as the benchmark for measuring progress and the achievements of the last 10 years.

There is international acceptance and recognition of the special 'case' of small islands, and their situation and responsibilities as custodians of vast ocean spaces. However, the trends of the past decade show that the approach to date has not been working to the scale necessary for transition to sustainable development. Achievements have been fragmented and have not been multiplied or sustained or, perhaps, not directed to areas of greatest need. As Rio+10 is to focus, as far as possible, on actions and specific initiatives, SIDS are focusing on "what next", and looking at what should constitute such initiatives.

Barbados Programme of Action

We need to make the noble vision of Rio work. The primary task was to translate principle to concrete action, to give form to instinct and to build understanding and commitment on this path to sustainable development. The BPOA was the first global effort to show how Agenda 21 could be translated into action. It is entirely pertinent that it is dedicated to a group of front-line ecologically and economically vulnerable countries. The Programme of Barbados remains today, as true; the priorities identified as valid and, in many cases, more urgent.

The implementation of BPOA was reviewed at its first 5-year anniversary at the special session of the General Assembly in 1999. Considerable efforts by SIDS were acknowledged. But the overall assessment pointed to no real substantive changes in achievement. To highlight the point, the review identified six focal areas requiring not only priority but urgent action. It is worth calling attention to these areas, namely: climate change, natural and environmental disasters, freshwater resources, coastal and marine resources, sustainable energy and tourism.

The General Assembly special session set out very specific and results-oriented goals to aim for. The language of the review document is a model for study. It was crafted, and negotiated deliberately, to be action-oriented and to lead to concrete implementable results. We cannot allow this document simply to be a well-formulated set of words. It needs to be implemented, and must be implemented. Rapid implementation was also reiterated in the Millennium Declaration.

The AOSIS countries therefore seek from this Commission and from the WSSD process the requisite decision for the BPOA to be comprehensively reviewed at its 10th anniversary in 2004 and for the right conditions to be established for such a review.

Declining environmental quality

There is, meantime, significant cause for concern, for the evidence from the UNEP Environment Outlooks points to a steady decline, sometimes serious, in environmental quality for all SIDS regions. The driving forces for this situation include urbanization, population, poverty, shortcomings with policies and governance and the other pressures that we share with all other developing countries.

Climate change

Most formidably for SIDS, climate change is an additional and exacerbating problem that goes directly to the roots of their sustainability. This problem for small island communities is understated and seriously under-estimated by the international community. So, let me say it in clear terms. Climate change is not of our doing, and we look to the international community for urgent and meaningful action. One day, with perseverance and hope, the Kyoto Protocol will produce the desired results. Meantime, we need serious and intensified efforts on adaptation measures to minimise the vulnerabilities of our communities and to assist especially the small and low-lying island countries that are already in danger. There is no doubt that much stronger mitigation measures will be required, and we are seriously concerned about the lack of willingness among the industrialised countries to take on their rightful responsibilities. They cannot be unaware that human lives and livelihoods are already now gravely at risk.

Regional approaches

The priority areas I have touched on are all large and difficult issues. From the perspective of the small, the sheer magnitude of the tasks to be tackled is near-overwhelming.

Regional approaches have thus become indispensable in our efforts towards sustainable development. Many and obvious benefits have been derived through joint effort and co-operation, by the SIDS as by our development partners. We know by demonstrated results the absolute value of regional arrangements, and we believe that we have yet to realize their full potential. Because regional approaches are so vital in the formulation of strategies and the implementation of sustainable development initiatives, we believe they should be the object of particular consideration in the preparations for Johannesburg. The AOSIS countries will continue to give the matter the closest attention, together with our development partners.

Energy

We consider the world's energy system to be unsustainable. The current reliance on fossil fuels, like other forms of addiction, has serious negative effects on the environment. We believe that renewable energy holds out real promise, for both economic growth and environmental health. We further believe that significant improvement in the efficiency of production and use of energy is possible and indeed economically and environmentally beneficial. To this end, we believe that the World Summit should work towards establishing a global partnership for financing renewable energy and energy efficiency to support the transition to sustainable development by all countries, but in particular for especially vulnerable countries like our own. We therefore call for the most serious consideration for developing and implementing innovative financing mechanisms, including the use of bilateral debt swaps. It is imperative that developing countries be assisted by mobilising and coordinating financial resources for them, with the participation of relevant international and regional organisations and entities. Secondly, we call for the establishment of mechanisms to facilitate the exchange of information, experiences and expertise in the area of sustainable energy, such as a clearinghouse mechanism on energy technologies and good practices in policies and measures.

Oceans

The oceans and seas unite and they sustain. They are quite simply fundamental to life and to the culture of all islands. Largely for this reason, I would need to say that we would have preferred to see it as a specific focal area for our work. But it is not reason alone. The ocean's coverage of the major face of the planet, and its potential for food security, poverty alleviation and resource and energy supply would seem, in our view, to make it an undoubted focal area. Additionally, we are concerned that dealing with different aspects of the oceans in a diverse manner may further contribute to a fragmented approach to the oceans issues. Such a result would be undesirable in our view.

The scientific consensus on climate change is unmistakable. Small island and low-lying areas will be among the first to take the full force of sea level rise and more severe climatic conditions. Storms will become more frequent and they will be more intense. This will have serious impacts on agricultural production, freshwater resources and land and marine biodiversity - in fact, on the entire island ecosystem.

We would, therefore, most strongly support the proposal for the "oceans, coasts and islands" as a separate item.

Vulnerability

Distinguished representatives of small island States who have spoken earlier have laid emphasis on the vulnerability of our countries. I, of course, endorse fully their remarks.

The point about vulnerability is not randomly made, but rather to direct attention to the constraints that exist, and what could be done to overcome them. We believe the experience of SIDS will yield useful results for other countries. Most SIDS have completed their national communications to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. The findings confirm our fears for they point extreme sensitivity and vulnerability to natural disasters and to climate change impacts. And, moreover, they underline the fact that small islands are the least able to adapt. With the continuing growth of greenhouse emissions among many industrialised countries we expect that this state of SIDS vulnerability will increase on an annual basis.

Since Barbados, the SIDS have been engaged in the international work on vulnerability measures based on economic factors. We believe very strongly that in the application of these measures to SIDS, by the Committee for Development Policy and by others, the total vulnerability of small islands be taken fully into account including, for instance, the consequences of their exposure to the consequences of climate change. We want to ensure that the full and true measure of vulnerability be understood and counted.

To this end, the Pacific countries are now well advanced in the development of an environmental vulnerability index; and the Caribbean States are in the process of developing a similar vulnerability index to study the effects of social factors.

By these measures SIDS hope to be able to better understand and assess the capacity and ability of their communities in their efforts for sustainable development. These are regional initiatives, born of necessity. When fully operational, we believe they will bear useful insights for other countries, and that the social and environmental issues can be brought in to the equation. In this manner we may be able to work towards a sustainable development index or a sustainable development profile for all countries. This could become a tool that countries can use to map their progress and to highlight to the international community the areas where special support would be required. We take the opportunity to thank the several countries among our development partners that are funding and assisting with the development of these indices, and to commend these initiatives to the Commission.

Globalisation

We must also address the facts that the global economy has benefited countries with unequal largesse. A few developing countries have attracted the majority of foreign direct investment. The rest of us, in our dealings with the invisible hand of the market, have encountered benefits that are almost as invisible. While accepting that the preferences enjoyed in the past will have to be modernised, we stress that there is need for some protection for our economies as we move to trade liberalisation. We are learning the hard way that, in opening up our economies, we put at risk our indigenous businesses and industries through exposing them to excessive competition from much stronger and well-resourced international companies. However, our consumers do benefit in some case from cheaper products. But the outcome of this form of globalization is that we are losing our indigenous private sector and the employment and contribution it makes to economic development at the national level.

The accelerated pace of globalisation and unbridled liberalisation pose serious and additional challenges to SIDS in their efforts at achieving sustainable development, given their various limitations and an increasingly unsupportive international climate. Our fragile economies and fledgling industries cannot survive open competition. We need a global economic system, in particular a trading system that recognises limitations and vulnerabilities of countries and make specific provision to allow for their survival in the increasing globalising economy in our interdependent world.

Capacity Building

Our assessment of progress continues to highlight the absolute and fundamental importance of capacity building to our future. The experience to date from the limited initiatives for capacity building funded primarily through the Capacity 21 Trust Fund has resulted in impressive outcomes in the majority of countries, albeit on a modest scale.

However, the challenge now is to develop and implement an initiative of significantly larger scale that is able to respond to the growing needs of capacity development that cuts across all sectors of sustainable development.

Based on the statements by officials of the UN agencies involved we expect in due course to be informed of the results of the evaluation of capacity building efforts such as Capacity 21. The recommendations as to how an appropriately scaled initiative can be established, and an effective and efficient mechanism for its implementation, with full partnership with the developing countries, must be part of our deliberations. We note with some concern that a number of initiatives by various international organizations such as the GEF, UNEP, UNDP, the World Bank and others, are all involved to some extent in capacity building efforts. We urge that these agencies and the donor groups to pursue partnerships in order to minimise duplication and to ensure the most efficient mechanism for the implementation of future activities in the area of capacity building. We therefore call for openness and transparency from these agencies, and I should say that we would expect a frank and open discussion on the lessons from past capacity building exercises, such as Capacity 21 and the Sustainable Development Network.

We are concerned because capacity building is an investment where interest compounds but one that requires regular and well-planned deposits. This investment is required across the board from awareness raising through basic education to scientific and technical training. The challenge is to ensure that at Johannesburg we establish partnerships and a "banking system" for a global capacity building initiative, delivered through effective regional and sub-regional institutions, and responsive to the immediate and long term needs of people throughout the developing world.

Financial provisions

We agree that the focus of Johannesburg should be on the means of implementation and of moving Agenda 21 into action in ways that will truly benefit all our citizens. We expect that in large measure, it will come down to resources, and we should be open to discussing all possible avenues for financing sustainable development, including the innovative use of debt.

The AOSIS countries fully accept their primary responsibility in the matter. Indeed, with respect to the implementation of the BPOA, the figures we have suggest that up to 70% of the activities undertaken have been financed by the national governments of SIDS themselves. But the role of the international community is essential, and the obligations and commitment to assist cannot be set aside, especially in the areas of climate change adaptation and capacity building.

But there are anomalies and, yes, inequities in the system. And these need to be dealt with. In the Pacific region it has been estimated that the value of the annual fish catch - before processing - is around \$4 billion. The island countries receive about 1 to 2% of that in license fees. Clearly, even a small adjustment would produce dramatic results for their economies.

It is also necessary for our group to say a few words regarding the linkages to the International Conference on Financing for Development. Within the existing international economic environment, SIDS face rather unique challenges determined largely by their smallness and isolation and inability to compete internationally. SIDS need to build their technology capacity through science and technology transfer and the enhancement of information and communication technologies.

The particular vulnerability of SIDS to exogenous, environmental and economic events impede their opportunities for development. Their structural weakness constrains their competitiveness and ability to participate effectively in the international economic and trading system, while the process of globalization compounds the risks of their marginalisation. Furthermore these factors also limit the prospects of these countries' ability to attract foreign direct investment and other international private flows.

We have stated our view that the International Conference on Financing for Development should focus on the needs of all developing countries. AOSIS comprises a group of SIDS that includes LDCs and middle-income developing countries. Some of their needs are: continued access to official development assistance, particularly for access to social investment; concessional financing arrangements; reduction of debt servicing and debt stock; access to private capital flows; establishment of a normative and legal framework for the conduct of foreign investors; and improved access to markets and improved terms of trade for developing countries

We will therefore readily lend our support to a frank discussion of these issues of equity in the global economy, and hopefully to produce as frank an assessment of what all countries can commit to in implementing Agenda 21. Let us start with the report of the Secretary General, knowing full well that we also need to take on board the concerns of different countries so that we can achieve a focused consensus in Johannesburg.

Thank you.