

Statement delivered by the Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, Dr Rolph Payet at the First Preparatory Meeting of the Small Island Developing States International Meeting, Jan 22-26, 2024.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates

This is the first time the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention will participate in a SIDS International meeting, although personally I have been engaged in the preparation and attendance to the previous 3 SIDS international meetings, including the last one in Samoa as former Minister of Environment and Energy from the Seychelles. In my new capacity as the Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention secretariat based in Geneva, Switzerland, it is an honor for me today to address you and draw attention to one of the most significant planetary crisis, besides climate change and biodiversity – that of pollution!

Within the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention Secretariat we also have a SIDS focal person as we believe that today more than ever SIDS face an unprecedented challenge in dealing with pollution including the management of wastes, as well as chemicals, either used as pesticides but more so in the increasingly complex consumer products imported, ranging from food, toys, furniture to electronic products. The lack of capacity and the growing mountains of wastes that cannot be handled by SIDS is of grave concern especially with regards to human health and the fragile

environment of SIDS. It is for this reason the Global Environment Facility approved one of its largest global GEF projects ever, entitled GEF Islands, and I am happy to see that 33 SIDS are involved with the aim of safely disposing over **200,000 tonnes of hazardous products** and **17,000 tonnes of toxic chemicals**, including Persistent Organic Pollutants. It will also lead to the avoidance of nearly 90 tonnes of mercury. Through co-finance activities it will avoid over 300,000 tonnes of marine litter - mostly plastics. This is certainly ambitious, but not sufficient as we will need to look at building, not only local capacities for wastes and chemical management but explore pathways for circularity whereby such wastes can be exported safely and in an environmentally sound manner for recycling, recovery and safe disposal as per the requirements of the Basel Convention. I do note that of all the SIDS, only 3 SIDS are not yet Parties to the Basel Convention.

I personally have four targets, one is getting rid of the planet of DDT, and note that the last plant producing DDT will close down this year, however, I also note that two SIDS still have stockpiles of DDT. Let us move together to get those disposed in the most environmental manner. The second is meeting the goals of the Stockholm Convention to eliminate the use of PCBs by 2028. It is a rather tall order, but I am happy to hear that at least eight SIDS in the Caribbean have been able to eliminate PCB use, so let's use those lessons

learnt and add many more SIDS to the list. As mentioned before e-waste is growing in SIDS, and with the energy transition and increased use of solar panels and batteries, the issue stands to aggravate if we do not identify circular approaches to those innovations. Finally, the elimination of plastic wastes is urgent, for failure to do so will continue to wreak havoc to the oceans in particular, potentially threatening precious marine food stocks and biodiversity critical to SIDS resilience. The Basel adopted two key amendments in 2019 and 2023, respective on plastic wastes and electronic wastes. The Ban Amendment which prevents OECD countries from sending wastes to other countries came into force in 2019, and I note that several SIDS have not yet ratified to this important instrument against illegal transport and dumping of wastes in SIDS regions. I do note the strong participation of AOSIS in the INC negotiations on Plastics and invite you to continue to do so. The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions is also supported by a network of Regional Centres, two of which support implementation in SIDS, the Regional Centre in Trinidad and Tobago supports Caribbean SIDS and the Regional Centre hosted under SPREP supports the Pacific Island SIDS. We are working with SIDS in the African/Indian Ocean region to establish similar support for those SIDS in that region.

I also bring news from the Minamata Convention on Mercury, also based in Geneva. At least 14 SIDS are not yet party to the Minamata Convention, which aims to remove harmful products like mercury-containing skin lightening creams, batteries, thermometers, and more from SIDS markets, as effective alternatives are already available. Cooperation such as pooling laboratory capacity and implement effective monitoring programmes are also in progress.

I also bring you greetings from UNEP/GRID-Geneva who received mandate from UNEA5 to strengthen the scientific, technical and policy knowledge with regards to the extraction and use of sand and has published several reports and also a data platform which uses Artificial Intelligence and Automated Identification Signal emitted by vessels world-wide, to monitor the extraction of sand in the marine environment. Sand is in most cases your first line of defense in adaptation to sea level rise as well as wave and storm surges, thus sand management is of critical importance to SIDS resilience.

Finally, I wish to bring to your attention the upcoming United Nations Environment Assembly, or UNEA6, taking place in Nairobi at the end of February. There are many important issues of relevance to SIDS in particular the new Global Framework on Chemicals including its new trust fund, the negotiations for Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals and the Special

Programme fund which supports building institutional capacity in SIDs for chemicals and wastes management, as well as a resolution addressing SIDS issues at UNEA6.

It is therefore imperative that those important considerations are also added and negotiated in the SIDS4 agenda to be discussed and agreed to in Antigua and Barbuda later this year. Please help me keep pollution on the SIDS radar!

I reiterate the strong support of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions and my personal engagement in supporting you in this important process and look forward to a successful SIDS4. I will be in New York until Wednesday evening and would welcome bilaterals and discussions with SIDS missions and colleagues on the sidelines of this prepcom.

Thank you