

**Check Against Delivery**



**UNOHRLLS**

**Opening Remarks**

**By**

**Ms. Rabab Fatima  
Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser for the  
Conference &  
High-Representative  
for  
Least Developed Countries,  
Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing  
States**

**First Preparatory Committee Meeting for the  
Fourth International Conference on  
Small Island Developing States**

**New York, CR 4  
22 January 2024**

**Ambassador Carolyn Schwalger,  
Ambassador Ali Naseer Mohamed,  
Ambassador Walton “Aubrey” Webson,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,**

**I have the honor to address you in my capacity as the Special Adviser for the SIDS4 Conference and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS.**

**At the outset, I would like to congratulate Ambassador Ali on his election as a Co-Chair of the PrepCom. I take this opportunity to commend his predecessor, Ambassador Thilmeeza Hussain, for her important contributions to this process.**

**I also congratulate Ambassador Sanita Pavļuta-Deslandes of Latvia on her appointment as Rapporteur.**

**And I take this opportunity to thank, once again, our generous host for the SIDS4 Conference, Antigua and Barbuda, for their all-out support and cooperation to make the SIDS4 Conference a success.**

**Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues,**

**This meeting is a critical milestone on the road to the SIDS4 Conference to be held in May - just 4 months from now.**

**We thank the Co-Chairs for circulating the zero-draft of the outcome document, which captures the development aspirations of the SIDS for the next decade.**

**The next five days are going to be very important for the Member States to reflect and deliberate on the draft, and demonstrate a shared commitment to address the unique challenges of the SIDS.**

**[We all agree that] The new Programme of Action must be commensurate with the urgent and critical needs of the SIDS on the ground. Its commitments and deliverables need to contribute to the SIDS' efforts to bring about transformative changes in their economies and achieve the SDGs. It must also be forward-looking to reinforce the ambition of current multilateral efforts for ensuring a better future for all, especially in the lead up to the Summit of the Future.**

**Excellencies, Colleagues,**

**The primary objective of the Preparatory Committee is to lead an open, inclusive, and transparent intergovernmental process to deliver a focused, forward-looking, and action-oriented outcome document.**

**My office has been supporting this process in collaboration with UN-DESA.**

**To raise and mobilize political support and multistakeholder partnership, we have taken multi-pronged initiatives.**

**We have organized donor roundtables during the preparatory phase, facilitated the SIDS Global Business Network (GBN) Forum, and spearheaded the Partner2Connect (P2C) Digital Coalition.**

**Notably, \$17.7 billion in pledges have already been secured for improved connectivity in SIDS. This is indeed a big leap in our efforts to ensure internet connectivity for all in SIDs, especially for the 33% people, who are still offline.**

**Furthermore, we intensified our efforts to leverage the SIDS National Focal Points Network; advocate for SIDS in climate discussions, such as at the recently concluded COP28; engage on the proposal to establish the SIDS Centre of Excellence; and support the High-Level Panel on the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI).**

**We also co-chair the Interagency Consultative Group (IACG), an integral mechanism for information sharing, coordinating, and promoting coherence in the UN system, regional commissions and beyond on mainstreaming SIDS issues. [And I am very pleased to see the high level of participation of the UN entities**

**in this meeting, testament to the priority attached to the SIDS agenda by them. The UN system, will continue to contribute to the process through knowledge-based studies, reports, and other engagements.]**

**[And] My Office is developing a Communications and Advocacy Strategy for widespread dissemination of conference-related information.**

**Excellencies,**

**The SIDS4 Conference comes at a time when the SIDS are bearing the heaviest brunt of the current overlapping global crises, defined by the lingering impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions, climate change, and biodiversity loss.**

**These have added overwhelming burden to the pre-existing economic and climate change challenges of the SIDS. Many of them are now grappling with an unsustainable level of debt, averaging 60% of Gross National Income (GNI).**

**The cumulative effects of weather, climate, and water-related hazards in SIDS, which caused a staggering \$153 billion in losses in the last 50 years, continue to pose existential threats to these countries.**

**Their heavy dependence on imports such as fuel, food, industrial supplies among others, have led to a fiscal imbalance leaving them more vulnerable to external shocks.**

**Against this backdrop, the shockingly low allocation of climate finance to SIDS, with only 2% reaching them adds to their plight. And their lack of access to concessional financing and**



**grants coupled with considerable decline of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the past decade have made the situation worse.**

**This inadequacy in financial support becomes even more concerning when considering the escalating frequency, intensity, and scale of climate-related disasters.**

**Excellencies,**

**Despite these daunting challenges, SIDS have shown extraordinary resilience. They have taken many measures on their own instead of just waiting for the international community to act.**

**Over the years, the SIDS remained the strongest voice at the global level to fight against climate change, especially to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius.**

**The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) played a pivotal role for the global community to reach an agreement on the Loss and Damage Fund.**

**The Bridgetown Initiative ushered in a new era of hope and aspirations for reforming the global financial architecture.**

**And they have long been leading practical solutions for leveraging ocean resources for economic development and climate actions.**

**Yet SIDS alone cannot tackle the existential challenges that they are up against.**

**The international community must demonstrate enhanced solidarity and partnership to help them overcome these challenges.**

**The zero draft of the POA clearly identifies “What do SIDS want?”**

*SIDS want action,*

*They want access,*

*They want transformation,*

*They want partnerships.*

*And they want to chart the course toward resilient prosperity.*

**Allow me to highlight a few reflections on these:**

**First, on actions. The SIDS need an action-oriented document, which will further reinforce the urgent need for fulfilment of the already agreed global commitments to them.**

**For example, the fulfilment of the promises on climate finance, and double adaptation funds by 2025 have been at the top of their asks.**

**They have also stressed the need to scale up financial commitments to the tunes of billions for the Loss and Damage Fund.**

**Second, on access. SIDS need enhanced access to international capital markets, especially in low-cost, predictable long-term financing, and debt relief. They need enhanced aid coordination, which will align with their priorities.**

**A paradigm shift in the global approach to financing is another important priority. SIDS have long been asking for utilising new tools such as the multidimensional vulnerability index (MVI) to expand their opportunities for access to concessional financing.**

**Third, on transformation. It is imperative to leverage science, technology, and innovation in driving sustainable development and transformative economic growth in SIDS. It is important to ensure enhanced investment in renewable energy and green transition.**

**SIDS also need capacity support and investments in data collection to tailor informed policies for ensuring rapid development and growth.**

**Fourth, on partnership. The SIDS4 Conference need to create the widest possible coalition of partnerships leveraging North-South, South-South, and Triangular cooperation to put the SIDS on a transformative development agenda in the next decade.**

**This should also encompass SIDS-to-SIDS collaboration to mobilize human, financial, technical, and technological resources, and share best practices.**

**Excellencies,**

**The SIDS4 Conference provides us with a once in a decade opportunity to demonstrate global solidarity and partnership, to address the existential challenges of SIDS, and chart a strategic roadmap for sustainable and resilient prosperity for SIDS in the coming decade.**

**We must not miss this opportunity.**

**[Excellencies] Let me conclude by thanking our partners who have pledged support to the Secretariat Trust Fund.**

**I will continue my work in mobilizing the necessary resources to support all preparations to ensure a transformative, impactful Conference.**

**I wish the Co-Chairs a successful PrepCom. My office and I, are here to support you throughout this process.**

**I thank you.**