



Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)
Summary report on side event at the 4th International Conference on SIDS:
‘Small Islands, Plastic Oceans’
Wed 29 May, 2024 13:30-15:00h, ID Room, American University of Antigua



Background:

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) rely heavily on the marine environment for essential ecosystem services, socio-cultural ties, livelihoods, and economic growth and development, including through fisheries and tourism. Compounded by our limited land space, geographic vulnerabilities and susceptibility to external shocks, these factors squarely position SIDS as those disproportionately affected by global environmental threats, such as the plastic pollution crisis. As net-importers of plastics with limited domestic production and minimal contributions to the generation of plastic pollution, much of the plastic pollution affecting SIDS are transboundary and mismanaged waste, which occupy the marine environment and pose severe impacts to sound, sustainable economic growth and development, especially in the blue economy. In the approach to INC-5, this event convened SIDS experts to explore the key challenges faced by SIDS in addressing plastic pollution, across the fisheries, waste management, and tourism sectors, to advance the development of solutions that reflect SIDS national contexts and priorities.

Moderators:

Ms Anama Solofa, Lead Oceans Negotiator, AOSIS
Ms Joan Yang, Advisor, AOSIS

Interactive dialogues and speakers:

1. **‘The impacts of Abandoned Lost or otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear on fisheries in SIDS’ - Dr Linroy Christian, Director of Analytical Services Laboratory - Ministry of Agriculture, Antigua and Barbuda**
2. **‘Challenges for the tourism industry in SIDS’ - Ms Claudia Taboada, Director for Science, Technology and Environment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, INC focal point and lead negotiator, Dominican Republic**
3. **‘Waste Management and Recycling in SIDS - Challenges and Opportunities’ - Mr Fakasoa Tealei, Acting Secretary for Ministry of Home Affairs, Climate Change and Environment, Tuvalu**
4. **‘Remediation of legacy plastic pollution in the marine environment’ - Ms Fathimath Nashwa (aka Nell), Assistant Director, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, Maldives, and Mr Sefanaia Nawadra, Director General, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)**



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Summary

The event brought together SIDS voices from the various geographic regions that comprise the AOSIS membership. From the outset, it was clear that there is political will from SIDS to address the multifaceted issue of plastic pollution, through a full life cycle approach. Plastic pollution also affects our health and food safety and interplays with climate change. To manifest our ambition through the new treaty must fully take into account the special circumstances of SIDS, including limited human capacity and technologies, lack of infrastructure, small economies with narrow resource bases, especially being net importers of plastics.

Plastic pollution is also compounded by environmental effects, such as hurricanes and storms which also contribute to issues such as flooding and the creation of breeding grounds for diseases and pests.

Speakers also highlighted the importance of the role of science - especially in areas such as microplastics and chemicals of concern - both during the negotiation process and implementation of the treaty. The need for synergies was also emphasised across existing relevant frameworks and conventions, to avoid the duplication of action and to consider the lessons learnt.

All speakers underscored the need for robust means of implementation, which is a place where the ambition that SIDS seek must be met with the requisite tools, resources and accessible funding to implement the agreement.

Key highlights:

- Ambassador Fatumanava-o-Upolu III Dr Pa'olelei Luteru initiated the discussion by speaking to the issue of plastic pollution and its disproportionate impacts on small island developing states (SIDS). Reference was also made to the current plastic pollution negotiations and some of the key priorities for SIDS in the development of a future international legally binding instrument, including but not limited to, provisions related to plastic gears used for fishing activities, the collection, sorting, recycling and sound disposal of plastic waste, remediation of existing plastic pollution, and effective means of implementation for SIDS.
- On the issue of fishing gear, Dr Linroy Christian highlighted the importance of addressing it comprehensively on two levels: marine pollution and waste, while noting with concern that the revised draft text only examines the issue as waste which can be limiting. With ongoing severe impacts on the marine environment, he elaborated that it is both a transboundary issue as well as an end-of-life management issue, proliferated by dumping and natural disasters (e.g. hurricanes). Dr Christian also spoke to the limited capacities and capabilities of SIDS to effectively address this issue, and emphasised that means of implementation, including the use of alternative technologies, will be critical. On the approach to regulating fishing gear, he underscored the need for coordination and cooperation and stressed caution in ensuring that fisheries in SIDS are not negatively affected.
- During the discussion on plastic pollution and tourism in SIDS, Ms Claudia Taboada shared statistics and data on the importance of the industry to the Dominican Republic, accounting for 90% of its GDP (including side-benefits), while highlighting the challenges plastic pollution poses. With over 88 tons of plastic waste generated annually, less than 25% are properly managed. Ms Taboada noted that the once-pristine beaches are inundated with plastic pollution, including from transboundary sources. Plastic pollution also exacerbates biodiversity loss, drainage issues, flooding, and the breeding of mosquitoes and pests, with consequent impacts



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on human health, including from the illegal burning of plastic waste. She emphasised the need for the future treaty to ensure appropriate timeframes and goals to address the issue, support improved recycling, waste management, transparency and monitoring, encourage multistakeholder action, and financial support for SIDS.

- On the third topic of waste management and recycling in SIDS, Mr Fakasoia Tealei noted that the main challenge surrounds capacity constraints, and limited waste management infrastructure, including equipment, technologies and especially their maintenance. Moreover, it was contended that many SIDS are not producers and inherit the majority of plastics which become pollution and even wind up in the food chain. Drawing from his experiences within the Ministry of Home Affairs, Climate Change and Environment, Mr Tealei spoke to the issue of fragmentation among the agencies and authorities with responsibility for waste management, and stressed the need for greater cooperation and coordination. He further noted bans on single use plastics are helpful, but challenges remain in terms of determining phase-out periods and the economic feasibility of alternatives and substitutes. It was stressed that bans by themselves are not sufficient to curb the problem, however, capacity building, technology transfer and financing must be commensurate with the scope of substantive obligations needed to effectively end plastic pollution.
- Regarding the remediation of existing plastic pollution in the marine environment, Mr Sefanaia Nawadra reminded the audience that UNEA resolution 5/14 prescribes a full life-cycle approach, from production to remediation. He drew attention to the fact that there are now two plastic gyres in the Pacific, and effective financing is needed to help remediate this issue. Ms Fathimath Nashwa added that the Maldives is considered 99% ocean, and the local economy is closely linked to the ocean with tourism as the main revenue earner, followed by fisheries. She too supported the need for financing that is new, predictable, accessible, and considerate of the special circumstances of SIDS.
- The speakers then responded to questions from the audience on issues such as chemicals of concern and the need for synergies. Dr Christian highlighted that there is a current divide in the negotiations, however coordination and cooperation with the chemicals conventions such as Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions is critical, noting that there are many lessons to learn and a significant number of chemicals in plastics that are not covered by these agreements.
- On means of ensuring a SIDS unified approach, the speakers spoke to the coordinating role AOSIS has played and continues to play on behalf of the SIDS involved with the INC. It was highlighted that it is helpful to work toward synergies with other groupings of states as well in the INC, and to make full use of the intersessional period to continue to support our work in the negotiations, including through virtual means and other convenings such as SIDS4.

(See photos on page 4)



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PHOTOS FROM THE EVENT:



- **Ambassador Fatumanava-o-Upolu III Dr Pa'olelei Luteru**, *Permanent Representative of Samoa to the United Nations, AOSIS Chair.*



- **Dr Linroy Christian**, *Director of Analytical Services Laboratory - Ministry of Agriculture, Antigua and Barbuda*



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- **Mr Fakasoa Tealei**, *Acting Secretary for Ministry of Home Affairs, Climate Change and Environment, Tuvalu*



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- **Mr Sefanaia Nawadra**, *Director General, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)*