



**Remarks by Hon. James Fletcher
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Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States

Statement to the General Debate

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Introduction

Mr. President, we are convened here in Samoa, an island nation renowned both for its natural beauty and the warmth and hospitality of its people. I am sure that I speak for all the visiting delegations when I say that the reality that we have witnessed far exceeds reputation. Not only have the arrangements for this conference been exceptional, but the distinct island warmth and charm of the people of Samoa has been outstanding. Therefore, to the Government and People of Samoa, *Penina ole Pasefika* (Pen-nee-nah o-lay Pass-eh-fee-ka) the Pearl of the Pacific, I say *fa'afetai* (fah-ah-fay-tie) and *fa'amalo* (fah-a-mah-lo) – thank you and congratulations.

Our Journey

Many of us have travelled long distances to be here, some with several stops along the way. In the case of my delegation, the length of our journey is perhaps best reflected by the fact that there is a seventeen-hour time difference between Samoa and Saint Lucia.

Similarly, Mr. President, the community of Small Island Developing States has journeyed long and far over the past twenty-two (22) years, with many stops *en route*. From our conception in Rio, to our birth in Barbados, and various milestone birthdays along the way in Mauritius, at Rio+20, and now our celebration of our very own International Year of SIDS here in Samoa, we have all travelled in pursuit of a sustainable future. However, while all of us gathered here in Samoa can safely say that we have truly arrived at an island paradise, the record shows that our community of small island nations has yet to arrive at a point or a port of sustainability.

A Special Case for Sustainable Development

Previous speakers have emphasized the fact that SIDS represent a “special case” for sustainable development. The basis for this special status - size, remoteness, vulnerability to external shocks, among others - is well documented. Notwithstanding, and despite all the declarations, affirmations and reaffirmations, overall progress in surmounting the numerous challenges facing our community of island nations, has, over the last two decades, been modest, at best. Indeed, in some areas, there has been noticeable regression.

The slow pace of progress, especially over the last decade, can be ascribed to many factors, including, but certainly not confined to: a prolonged economic recession; static or dwindling support on the part of some development partners; the failure of key partners to fulfill their pledge to scale up climate finance; the seeming eagerness of some to prematurely graduate our countries to Middle Income Status, based on outmoded criteria that are clearly out of step with the empirical studies on vulnerability and resilience; and the relentless succession of catastrophic events, some fuelled by climate change, which has resulted in what can be best captured by the acronym ERaSER- Extreme and Rapid Socio-Economic Reversal.

The Threat Posed by Climate Change

By way of an example, in 2010, my country Saint Lucia, after having gone through the worst drought in forty years, experienced Hurricane Tomas, which deposited 600 millimeters, or 24 inches, of rain in 24 hours. Hurricane Tomas claimed several lives and in one fell swoop instantly erased 50% of our country's GDP. On Christmas Eve last year, a day when Saint Lucians traditionally focus on faith, family, food and festivities, the skies unexpectedly darkened and unleashed torrential downpours that resulted in death, damage, debt and despair. Unfortunately, this event will forever be remembered as the Santa Trough.

In recent times, extreme weather events have become the terrifying norm for the peoples of SIDS. These events, which are becoming increasingly severe due to anthropogenic changes to our climate, have wreaked havoc on our social, economic and environmental landscapes. However, despite the international publicity that follows each of these disasters, we are yet to see the scaling up of ambition from Annex 1 countries to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases so that we may contain global warming to 1.5° Celsius.

Similarly, despite lofty promises and pledges of increased financing for climate change adaptation, these promises have been more honoured in the breach than observance. Mr. President this cannot continue. This morning, in a breakfast meeting between SIDS leaders and His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki Moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations, the Secretary General urged us to continue to lift our voices on the issues that matter to us. I welcome this call and commend the Secretary General for his unwavering support for the SIDS agenda. However, it is even more important that we exhort the community of developed countries to stop paying lip service to the SIDS agenda and to provide our vulnerable countries with the tangible, real financial and technical support that we so desperately need if we are accurately graduate to middle income status.

The Income Status of SIDS

Mr. President, this issue of graduation from least developed to middle income status is one that is particularly vexing for our countries. The absurd and unrealistic use of a GDP-per-Capita metric to measure the prosperity or viability of small, open, vulnerable, highly-indebted economies like ours, that have been experiencing weak levels of growth for well over a decade, flies in the face of logic. It is a somewhat cynical and very convenient use of statistics to arrive at what appears to be a pre-ordained conclusion, which is to take SIDS out of a category that provides them preferential access to concessionary, multilateral financing. We believe it is much more useful and intellectually correct to use vulnerability indicators, such as those articulated in the Commonwealth Vulnerability Index, to assess the true status of SIDS. Moreover, it is equally important to allow for

a longer, more reasonable time period for SIDS eventually to make the transition to a sustainable trajectory of economic, social and environmental development. Mr. President, the rejection of this premature graduation of our SIDS community must be one of the resounding statements of this Conference.

More than Climate Change

Mr. President, this Third International SIDS Conference is not just about the impact of Climate Change, but it is very easy for us to spend much of our time speaking on this subject because Climate Change is a dark, ominous cloud, our very own Sword of Damocles, which follows SIDS wherever we go. However, for our SIDS community, there are myriad other issues that require urgent and focused attention.

Among these are the impact that non-communicable diseases and now emerging diseases like Chikungunya in the Caribbean is having on the wellbeing of our population and the strain that is being placed on our health systems and infrastructure. There is a very real risk that the current economic crisis, the limited fiscal space within which our governments now operate, and the reclassification of our countries as middle income by the World Bank will create a perfect storm that will reverse the many gains our countries have made in health care over the past two decades.

Mr. President, the management of our water resources poses a serious challenge for many SIDS. This year, as Minister with responsibility for Water, I had the unfortunate duty to declare a water-related emergency in my country for the months of May, June and July. All of the modeling data suggest that this will be a more common occurrence in coming years, with predictions of as much as a 25% reduction in water availability in the future, based on projected rainfall. The effects of this on economic activity, health and other social sectors are obvious. There are many interventions that we can make to develop greater resilience in our water systems, including increasing reuse and recycling of wastewater, reducing deforestation, investing in rainwater harvesting, ameliorating storage systems, minimizing losses from delivery systems, more strategic conservation measures at the domestic and commercial levels, and developing artificial wetlands, such as was done in the community of Au Leon, Dennery in my home country through the GEF-funded Integrated Watershed and Coastal Areas Management Project. However, like with so many of these interventions, financial and technical support will be required.

The Role of AOSIS

Mr. President, the Honourable Freundal Stuart, the Prime Minister of Barbados, the country in my Caribbean region where this journey started twenty years ago, often speaks of the importance of the SIDS Collective. This is a reference to the need for our community of SIDS to speak together and as one in international fora. The Alliance of Small Island States, AOSIS, has done an

exceptional job in representing the interests of SIDS in the international community on Climate Change. However, given the multiplicity of issues that confront SIDS and impact and constrain their sustainable development and viability, it may be opportune for us to consider an expansion of the mandate of AOSIS to encompass the other critical needs and concerns of SIDS.

The Importance of Partnerships

Mr. President, the theme chosen for this conference is "The sustainable development of Small Island Developing States through genuine and durable partnerships". Clearly, if we are to see meaningful or rapid, as opposed to modest or negative, progress in the next decade, we must breathe life into this motto and not let it become an empty platitude after we have left Apia. We must redouble and accelerate our efforts to regain lost ground and to seize opportunities delayed and denied.

Many of the urgent issues treated in the draft outcome document of this conference are challenges related to the global commons and are decidedly not of SIDS' own making. In the realm of social and economic development - from gender equality and youth unemployment to crime and violence; from non-communicable diseases to debt - SIDS are grappling with urgent issues that are inextricably tied to global realities.

If we see these issues as global, then it follows that in an increasingly interdependent world, we must develop an approach that involves all nations working within a framework of collective action. We have no reasonable alternative to working together and the urgency of global cooperation is now more apparent than ever.

This approach must be based on a global partnership - genuine and durable - between developed and developing countries, the terms of which were set out at the conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico. This historic compact was firmly grounded in the principles of mutual responsibility and mutual accountability. It reaffirmed the responsibility of each country for its own development and elicited concrete commitments from wealthy nations to support more vulnerable ones.

In my country, Saint Lucia, we recognize the value of creating a contract with civil society and the private sector in articulating our development agenda. This is why, Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to append to my Statement to the General Debate of this Third International SIDS Conference a Declaration on Climate Change, containing over two thousand signatures, by the Saint Lucia Chapter of the Caribbean Youth Environment Network and a Statement from over forty Civil Society Organizations.

This partnership must be extended to the private sector - local, regional and international: the institutions that have grown big and profitable by feeding, sometimes unsustainably, off the substrate of resources that many of us are trying to manage. This concept of a partnership where the private sector makes tangible, unconditional investments into the development of vulnerable countries like ours must be a central theme of the post-2015 development agenda.

Allied to this is the need for us to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and to work together to identify and apply solutions that fit our respective circumstances and needs, whether with respect to sustainable energy, biodiversity, water security, human health, oceans management or research. In this regard, imagination, ambition, vision and commitment will be needed, along with a more intelligent alliance between public institutions, private enterprise and civil society.

Conclusion

Mr. President, we are gathered here at a most critical juncture on our journey towards the sustainable development of our countries. How we deal with the global challenges over the next five to ten years will determine not just the fate of SIDS, but that of our entire planet, for generations.

Our children and their children will depend on us to take action, rather than just fill halls such as these with lofty, impressive words. It is we, not they, who must execute the commitments that we have made and to move from the realm of aspiration to a posture of implementation. Let this Third International SIDS Conference be the place where we adopt and apply an entirely new paradigm and practice of collaboration that supersedes the traditional silos that have divided governments, philanthropies and private enterprises for decades, and replace it with networks of partnerships working together to create a globally prosperous and sustainable society.

Let us truly ensure that the SAMOA pathway lives up to its name and its goal, which is to accelerate action on the issues that matter to SIDS.

I thank you.