

Remarks by H.E. Lois Young, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Belize to the United Nations

Event: UN DESA Webinar Series: Sustainable Transport and COVID-19: Response and Recovery

Topic: *Impact of COVID-19 on countries in special situations and forward-looking transport solutions*

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Good Morning Excellencies, Colleagues. Thank you Naiara (facilitator) for the introduction; and I would like to express my gratitude to UN DESA for the invitation to participate in this webinar series, and speak to how (1) SIDS have been impacted by COVID-19, particularly in the transport sector, and (2) some SIDS proposed solutions to sustainable transport.

I assure you that I will keep my intervention brief and within the allotted time.

As a precursor to this discussion, the AOSIS Chair and the Government of Belize hosted the Placencia Ambition Forum in April of this year, which brought together SIDS and major climate actors to discuss and highlight areas where further work is needed to support raising ambition. One of the key areas discussed at length was the transport sector of SIDS, and the immediate impacts to Island economies as a result.

Vulnerability of Transport Sector in SIDS

Transportation networks are the physical corridors that enable SIDS to sustain their economies, and maintain social cohesion. The transport sector plays a central role in SIDS's vulnerability. In land transport, major transport infrastructure makes up a large share of public assets; and, when small nations face immense infrastructural damage due to floods, or storms on a periodic basis, governments are faced to pick up the pieces and take quick measures to restore mobility, often with limited means to "climate proof" major road networks.

Further to land transport, sustainable maritime transport is also uniquely important for SIDS in order to maintain connectivity among their scattered islands and to move goods and people between them. Needless to say, due to our mainly undiversified economies, we are heavily reliant on international trade for energy products and basic consumer needs. This is essential infrastructure that must be made resilient.

In SIDS particularly, adapting these highly vulnerable transport networks is often ignored, relative to mitigative transport initiatives which focusses on a longer time scale. There needs to be an equal weighting to both mitigation and adaptation if we are to be better prepared for climate-related system disruption than we were for COVID-19.

Key Examples of where SIDS have set goals in Sustainable Transport

Prior to COVID-19, many SIDS had strong national targets, policies, and projects to integrate sustainable transport into their national plans. For example:

- **Barbados** --commits to 100% renewable energy and being a carbon neutral island by 2030. One short term goal to convert the Government fleet to electric vehicles
- **Nauru** has enhanced both their port accessibility, economic stability, and climate resilience through developing its fully climate resilient port
- **Cabo Verde** – Electric Mobility Policy – All vehicles to be electric by 2050, 54% by 2030. Currently at 17%.
- **Singapore** – Sustainable Land Transport System – Internal combustion engine vehicles to be completely phased out by 2040. Walk Cycle Ride (WCR) so that anywhere in the city can be reached within 40 mins and in towns within 20 mins.
- **Maldives** - High Speed Public Ferry Network for inter-island transport utilising fuel efficient standardised hybrid boats and with major co-benefits to accelerate social and economic growth and achieve other UN SDGs.

SIDS Examples of Major Transport Challenges brought by COVID-19

Despite SIDS taking have had included sustainable transport initiatives into their national plans and policies, the onset of COVID-19 has, for many, unraveled a plethora of unforeseen impacts to their economies, and existing plans and work under way.

1. Diversion of Development Funds to COVID-19 Relief

Maldives- COVID-19 has delayed the implementation of the High-Speed Public Ferry Network in the Maldives as funds had to be diverted from the project for emergency reasons. This is typical of the difficult balancing positions SIDS increasingly find themselves in particularly as the impacts of climate change will continually worsen in the short term.

2. Crumbling Economies and Crushing Debt

The sudden, deep and likely prolonged downturn in the travel and tourism sector, has brought immense financial insecurity to various SIDS whose main economic sector is Tourism. On average, the tourism sector accounts for almost 30% of SIDS economies. As a result, SIDS have seen a steep shortage of foreign exchange, which it requires to pay off its debt and pay for imports.

(Most heavily impacted by tourism loss include the Maldives, Seychelles, St. Kitts and Nevis, Most heavily impacted by debt include Seychelles, Bahamas, Jamaica)

3. Disrupted Supply Chains and Emergency Response

This April, just about a month into COVID-19 response, Tropical Cyclone Harold hit four Pacific Island nations---the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, and Tonga leaving behind destruction in its wake.

The humanitarian response to these nations were hugely delayed due to added Covid-19 quarantine restrictions for health workers and those with critical supplies to move between islands, or arriving on limited commercial flights.

Other concerns for food security were also weighed on these countries. For Vanuatu and Fiji, this meant strains on local food supply due to massive agricultural loss, compounded by strained access to imports of food supplies due to strict import protocols as a result of the pandemic. Furthermore, what food aid was received, was met with difficulty due to roads being washed away.

SIDS specific Solutions to Sustainable Transport

Notwithstanding the immense financial burden that COVID-19 has brought upon SIDS, there are significant opportunities for increased mitigation action for both land and maritime transport.

The small size of our markets has hampered the deployment of low-carbon technologies. We need to consider approaches that can build economies of scale. Increasing the uptake of both sustainable and resilient transport will require targeted policy work and capacity building to develop plans that are appropriate for the SIDS and for each small island state. Each SIDS has varying geographies and infrastructure are very different.

1. Island Specific Transport Solutions

The solutions to implement sustainable transport systems has to be unique to island and cultural preferences, and most importantly convenient. For example, while various Caribbean islands have shown high potential for electric mobility in their small road networks, many Pacific Islands may choose to focus their efforts on inter-island connectivity using more renewable fuel sources.

2. Holistic approach towards Transport Policy

Similarly, in the context of SIDS, maritime and aviation sectors are hugely important but often neglected in NDC representation relative to land transportation. Also, logistics, and the movement of cargo must be considered, not just the movement of people. There needs to be a holistic approach in policy formulation.

3. Means to Scale up existing Sustainable Transport Efforts

There does not have to be a conflict between emission reduction and economic development. SIDS already have some positive examples of sustainable transport projects so far, but require innovative methods to test and then scale up actions that will enable long term change.

4. Synergistic Approach to Transport Financing

Finally, there is just not enough funding from international sources for SIDS mitigation and adaption actions in the transport sector. With this in mind, we must look for the opportunities for synergy. Because transport is so integral to all aspects of everyday life and the functioning of societies, the co-benefits that transport reform delivers need to be better defined and leveraged in order to access the considerable funding required to pursue these efforts.

We need to make a strong argument for the benefits that go beyond GHG emissions, including how transport projects can increase energy security, resilience, decrease cost to government and society and increase social cohesion.

End.

Thank you.