



**Statement by  
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**On Behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)**

**At the Agriculture Plenary session  
of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting  
for the 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development  
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Madam Chair:

I am honoured to address you on behalf of the Member States of AOSIS on the theme of agriculture.

The consideration of the theme of agriculture is of especial importance and relevance for AOSIS. Notwithstanding their diverse needs and circumstances, particularly in relation to agriculture, Small Island Developing States face a number of common problems that are essentially structural in nature. Many of our countries depend on a narrow base for revenue generation and agriculture has also been the economic backbone and the main source of livelihood for the population in many SIDS. In addition, many SIDS have sought to diversify their economic base through the effective and rational use of opportunities in the agricultural sector.

The CSD has a clear mandate in treating with agriculture in the context of promoting the sustainable development of SIDS. The thematic review was reaffirmed in paragraph 36 of the Mauritius Strategy which states, "To elaborate concrete strategies to enhance efficient and sustainable agricultural production and ensure their (SIDS) food security,... the United Nations system and other relevant international organizations are urged to provide practical support to small island developing States for research into such matters as: the diversification of agriculture; alternative uses for crops; improved husbandry; irrigation and water management; aquaculture; and the use of appropriate modern technologies for smallholder agriculture, including agricultural extension services."

Within the Commission, much has of course been said about agriculture. As early as at its third session in 1995 the Commission had considered the major adjustments needed in agricultural, environmental and macroeconomic policy, at both national and international levels, in developed and developing countries, to create conditions for sustainable agriculture and rural development. It had noted with concern then that even though some progress had been reported, disappointment is widely expressed at the slow progress in moving towards sustainable agriculture and rural development in many countries.

As the volatility in food prices over the past two years, among other things, has demonstrated, the situation is now even more urgent. CSD 17 provides an appropriate forum and opportunity to take bold measures to create the momentum and political will to realize the necessary qualitative shift in the treatment of the often thorny issues related to the theme of agriculture.

In this regard, we wish to assure you Madam Chair of our continued efforts to assist you and the members of the bureau in attaining our objectives. Allow me then to highlight some issues which in our view should command priority in our consideration of this theme.

AOSIS is of the view that sustainable development provides the context for discussions on agriculture, as well as the other thematic issues. For this reason, we anticipate the Commission's consideration of the six cluster issues in an integrated and balanced manner. Notwithstanding, since the economic vulnerability of SIDS is linked to the important share that natural resource sectors - like fisheries and agriculture-play in their economies, and reflects the crucial role that traditional commodities still play in their production structures, the Alliance calls for special attention to this theme in this session.

Among the major challenges SIDS face in relation to agriculture are – restricted market access, distorting subsidies in developed countries, population growth, land degradation, desertification, water management, lack of investments, poor infrastructure, urbanization, climate change impacts and natural disasters, high cost and limited availability of agricultural labour and agricultural inputs, lack of efficient pesticide monitoring and control programs, and a lack of proper post-harvest and agro-processing practices, limited transportation options and high costs, poorly developed marketing systems and limited human and financial resources.

In addressing these challenges in agriculture and food security, we believe there is need for an integrated and coordinated policy response to include - stepped up investment in science and technology in agricultural systems; the promotion of agricultural competitiveness through the development of efficient agricultural systems, diversification and value-added activities; greater research and development; limitation of erosion and damage from agrochemicals; development of partnerships development initiatives in capacity building and transfer of appropriate modern technologies; increased support for comprehensive and effective prevention, management, and controlling of invasive species.

Madam Chair:

High food prices have impacted ostensibly disproportionately on the poor. AOSIS is concerned that the volatility of food prices in conjunction with other global crises could potentially amplify deep-seated and growing inequalities between and within countries, thereby accentuating associated social, political and security risks. Available analysis suggests that, owing to the larger underlying problems, although prices have decreased somewhat in recent months that they are unlikely to return to pre-crisis levels. The problem is made more compelling by the fact that global food demand is expected to double by 2030.

The international community must therefore be unstinting in its support of short and long term action to help countries to cope with the reality of higher food prices. Such responses might include - more and better food aid; empowering farmers and the rural poor, especially women; strengthening coordination, monitoring, assessment and surveillance systems; a strategic stance on agricultural trade and bio-fuels; the expansion of social protection systems, particularly in order to protect the most vulnerable citizens in a fiscally responsible and sustainable manner; greater oversight of speculation in agricultural commodity markets; increased investment in research and development; technology transfer; and, stronger "partnerships for food" with Governments, NGOs, the scientific and academic communities, the private sector, and the media and others all playing their disparate roles in a coordinated manner.

Interestingly, while some opportunities do arise from the increase in food prices for net food exporting countries, their capacity to benefit, as well as that of many small farmers is severely limited by the volatility of commodity markets, the lack of inputs and investment, low levels of research and development activities, access to markets and advanced technologies and costs for fuel, fertilizers, machine components and transportation which rise at an even faster rate than commodity prices. Indeed, it has been aptly noted that poverty increases are much more frequent and larger than poverty reductions in response to food price increases among the poor.

Within the context of the food crisis, policies with respect to bio-fuels have naturally attracted increased scrutiny. AOSIS believes that a prudent approach to the use of bio-fuels could assure that it contributes to

solving rather than aggravating development challenges, including those related to food production and the supply of energy. This can be pursued particularly through South-South and triangular cooperation, including through the exchange of information and technical cooperation.

Madam Chair:

An open, fair and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system for agriculture products is a sine qua non for sustained economic growth and agriculture development in developing countries. There is need in this regard to work towards the elimination of all forms of trade distorting agriculture subsidies.

In the same way, since the reality of climate change exacerbates threats already affecting food security and poses new challenges in land, agriculture, and rural development, SIDS recognize the need to improve the capacity of developing countries to cope with the adverse impact of climate change in agriculture sectors. The Group has contemplated actions such as - increasing resilience of present food production systems; exploring insurance schemes to provide risk coverage for adverse impacts of climate change; providing new and additional financial resources for adaptation measures in the agricultural sector in developing countries – including appropriate incentives and or compensation for the preservation of forests in developing countries; and, strengthening their implementation mechanisms for adaptation measures.

AOSIS is of the view that global agriculture will be viable only in the context of genuine global development partnerships. There is need for complementary policies to reverse the decline in the share of ODA invested in agriculture on the one hand and on the other to increase investment in all phases of agricultural production in developing countries. In this regard, there is need for greater assistance in creating the appropriate investment climate for agriculture and rural infrastructure. Needless to say, the special challenges and capacity needs of SIDS need to be taken into account in the implementation of all technical assistance and capacity building programmes.

Madam Chair:

Agriculture has a well established comparative advantage in poverty reduction and should be central to the global priority to eradicate hunger and poverty. Coordinated short, medium and long term measures at the national and international levels must now be renewed to counter the challenges which prevent the gains and benefits of agriculture from being fully realized, especially in SIDS.

At the International Meeting in Mauritius in 2005, the donor community committed themselves to increase their level of support to the sustainable development efforts of SIDS. However, these promises and commitments remain largely unfulfilled. AOSIS again calls on all development partners to honour, in an urgent manner, all commitments related to SIDS and in particular those related to the provision of financial resources, technology transfer and capacity building.

AOSIS will continue its efforts to actualize global policies and initiatives to match the now universal recognition of the fundamental role of agriculture in attaining sustainable development. In light of the commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for further Implementation (MSI), we invite the partnership of the international community to complement our efforts and to support SIDS in designing and implementing appropriate strategies to counter the challenges in relation to agriculture.

I thank you Madame Chair.