

Statement by the Alliance of Small Island States
Thematic Discussion on Agriculture
Monday, May 5th, 2008

Distinguished Chair

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the members states of the Alliance of Small Island States.

Agriculture in SIDS has been faced in recent years with severe pressure due to competing uses, intra- and inter- sectorally, the lack of an adequate labour force being loss to non-agricultural activities, the loss of traditional markets, the loss of preferential marketing arrangements and commercialization of the food sector. The latter has implications for safeguarding our limited biodiversity stocks and will have significant health impacts.

SIDS which are heavily dependent on fishing are at risk of significant loss of earnings and retrenchment of labour if they do not find sustainable mechanisms to safeguard future production and productivity. As such our marine ecosystems must be maintained in the most pristine condition to ensure that fish stocks for food and general marine life is not compromised by events such as over-harvesting, pollution and fish kills.

Faced with the above challenges, SIDS need to find opportunities to diversify their economies and markets in a sustainable manner, especially in the agricultural sector, in order to increase their degree of food security and self-reliance. The international community must assist SIDS in their efforts to:

1. create an enabling environment for agricultural diversification;
2. develop environmentally sound programmes to support food production;

3. develop integrated approaches to sectoral planning and development;
4. develop capacity to meet the various new international requirements, such as the WTO agreement on agriculture, sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures (SPS), technical barriers to trade (TBT), and other standards and regulations,

In the latter context and given the significance of agriculture to many developing countries including SIDS, we maintain the view that agriculture must assume a prominent role in the global development agenda. We are therefore naturally concerned about the current stalemate in the Doha development Round of trade negotiations underway in Geneva. Within this context the early conclusion of the Round is critical and should ensure the fullest realization of the development dimension of the Doha Work programme to avoid further marginalization of SIDS in the global market place.

To elaborate concrete strategies to enhance efficient and sustainable agricultural production and ensure their food security, the UN system, and the FAO in particular, must provide practical support to SIDS, for research into such matters as: diversification of agriculture; alternative uses for crops; improved husbandry, irrigation and water management; aquaculture; and use of appropriate modern technologies for smallholder agriculture, including agricultural extension services. SIDS-SIDS partnerships, as well as partnerships with development partners, should be supported to assist cooperative efforts towards improved techniques and diversification.