



STATEMENT BY MR. BYRON BLAKE, AMBASSADOR, PERMANENT MISSION OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TO THE UN, ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA, ON THE OCCASION OF SIDS DAY (New York, 12 May 2008)

Distinguished Chair,

1. I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Commission on Sustainable Development was mandated fourteen years ago to serve as the primary intergovernmental body responsible for the implementation of and follow-up to the commitments related to Small Island Developing States (SIDS), including those contained in the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation. The BPOA of 1994 was the first major effort by the international community to implement Agenda 21. It was a clear recognition of the special circumstances of small island developing states in the context of sustainable development. We therefore welcome the convening of SIDS Day during the review sessions of the Commission as a valuable opportunity to assess progress and to further advance implementation of the BPOA and MSI. We also welcome the Report of the Secretary-General and the statement by the two Under-Secretaries-General. It would have been good if the facts had allowed them to report more positively.
2. The Group remains concerned over the state of implementation of the BPOA and the MSI. While SIDS themselves have made some progress at the national and regional levels in building the institutional capacity for sustainable development, in formulating strategies and action plans, and in carrying out policy reforms, they continue to encounter many serious problems and constraints which have slowed down or impeded the process of implementation.
3. The lack of financial, technical and human resources, relative to the enormity of the tasks to be accomplished, represents a common challenge faced by SIDS across all regions. Many critically needed infrastructural projects that require large investments such as air and maritime transport, and the related landside infrastructure adaptation to climate change and sea level rise, waste management, energy, tourism infrastructure, road and telecommunication infrastructure lie well beyond the resources of most Small Island developing States. At the same time the vulnerability of many of these critical infrastructural projects to natural disaster events and their relatively small size, in global terms, render them unattractive to private international capital. They require public funding.
4. The global trend of declining ODA levels has been evident in all developing countries, including an evident reduction in flows to SIDS. At the same time, in many SIDS, the availability of domestic financial resources has fluctuated, and in some cases has actually been diminished by adverse internal and external economic developments and natural disasters. Furthermore SIDS, due to their small size and limited productive capacities, have not benefited, as a group, from the expansion of global trade and investment.
5. At the International Meeting in Mauritius in 2005 the donor community committed to increase the level of support to the sustainable development efforts of SIDS. The international community also placed great reliance on the 1 August 2004 decision of the WTO Members to put the needs and interests of developing countries at the heart of the DOHA Work Programme and to facilitate the full and effective participation of small economies, "notably small island developing states". These

commitments remain unfulfilled. ODA has fallen and the DOHA Round has stalled.

6. The General Assembly in its resolution 62/191 has recognized the urgent need to increase the level of resources provided to small island developing States for the effective implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation. The urgency has increased with the current international crises relating to food, energy and finance. The Group of 77 and China appeals to all development partners to honour, with the urgency required, all commitments related to SIDS and in particular those related to the provision of financial resources, technology transfer, capacity building and trade facilitation.

7. The report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.17/2008/9) focuses on many challenges confronting SIDS with specific emphasis on the thematic cluster of issues of agriculture, rural development, land, drought and desertification. Given their small size, historical pattern of development and geographic location, these issues are of critical importance in SIDS. These challenges are highly interrelated and mutually reinforcing for SIDS. Climatic conditions leading to droughts and desertification and other pressures on the limited land resources intensify the pressures on agriculture and retard the prospects for rural development.

8. In SIDS pressures on land resources have been exacerbated by competing uses, increased demands, and land degradation, among others. The SG's report underscores the need for the international community to provide assistance to SIDS to build institutional capacity including appropriate legislative and regulatory frameworks for coordinated management and monitoring of their land resources. This assistance should include access to information on land resources and appropriate tools, and the dissemination of best practices and technologies for implementing sustainable land-use policies.

9. In the agricultural sector SIDS face unique challenges in their effort to diversify their economies and markets in order to increase their degree of food security, self-reliance and promote sustainable livelihoods. Over the past 20 years the value of SIDS' commodity exports has declined considerably as a result of the erosion of preferences, increased competition and falling commodity prices. The impact has been particularly severe in poor and rural communities in SIDS. The Group believes that efforts to assist SIDS in this area should be aligned with national and regional priorities and programmes to promote agricultural diversification, improve production and productivity, develop trade and marketing policy and institutional frameworks and improve food quality controls. They must also address the external trading environment.

10. The Mauritius Strategy underscores the serious challenges associated with land degradation faced by most SIDS. The Group calls on the international financial institutions, including the Global Environment Facility, to facilitate SIDS' access to financial and technical resources to develop and implement projects to address land degradation.

Distinguished Chair,

11. General Assembly resolution 62/191 called on the Secretary-General to prepare a report before the end of the 62nd Session on actions taken to strengthen the SIDS Unit in UNDESA, as called for in GA resolutions since 2002. The Group of 77 and China urges the Secretary-General to submit this report in a timely manner so as to enable this matter to be given the urgent attention and consideration it merits.

12. Finally, Mr. Chairman, at the opening of this review session the Group of 77 and China expressed its concerns over the convening of SIDS day in parallel with the water and sanitation

review session. The spirit and intent of the decision adopted at CSD-13 to devote one day of its review sessions to SIDS was to assign one day without any other activity, to ensure a thorough and focused review of the BPOA and MSI. It is the understanding of the Group of 77 and China that in agreeing to hold meetings of SIDS Day and the water and sanitation review in parallel during this session, that this will not constitute the establishment of a precedent for the future.

Distinguished Chair,

After 14 years and in the context of the crises impacting the development of SIDS, we must act now to ensure that this does not become a SIDS Remembrance Day.

I thank you.