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PREPCOM HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 30 AUGUST 1993

Amb. Penelope Wensley convened the Preparatory Committee of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States Monday morning. She said that with only 34 weeks until the Conference, the PrepCom meets at a time when expectations of the UN have never been higher, demands on the system never greater, and the world community is struggling to cope with a proliferation of problems. The first challenge is to capture attention and use this PrepCom to raise the level of awareness, knowledge and understanding of the problems of small island developing States (SIDS). She stressed that this meeting is one of the first opportunities for governments to turn the ideas and concepts of sustainable development into practical, concrete plans and programmes. The aim of the PrepCom should be to provide a model for pragmatic, useful actions that can be managed and implemented at the national, regional and international levels. By the end of this two-week session, the PrepCom should reach agreement on the Conference outcome and produce an outline of a "programme of action" for SIDS.

Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (DPCSD), said that the PrepCom marked the mid-point in the Conference process and preparations to date have helped clarify the issues. The case for the special consideration of SIDS has emerged clearly from the reports of the technical meetings and the vulnerabilities listed warrant international support and greater regional cooperation. These problems are readily identifiable and can be alleviated. The success of the Conference, therefore, will be a test of the continued commitment of governments to the Rio process.

After adopting the agenda and the programme of work (PC/5 and Corr.1, as amended by the Bureau), the Chair opened the general debate on Agenda Items 2 and 3.

GENERAL DEBATE

DPCSD Director Miles Stoby introduced the three documents that form the basis for the general debate. A/CONF.167/PC/10, is the Secretary-General's report on the sustainable development of SIDS. Chapter I gives an overview of the special problems of SIDS; Chapter II encapsulates the priority areas; and Chapter III discusses sectoral policies needed at all levels. A/CONF.167/PC/6 is an overview of system-wide activities relevant to the Conference. This report indicates that a significant number of activities in the UN system and other international organizations are either directly or indirectly relevant to the sustainable development of SIDS. He pointed out that a number of gaps exist and not all agencies contributed to this

report. Finally, A/CONF.167/PC/9 addresses activities of the Conference secretariat, including its establishment, preparations by the host government, dates for the Conference (25 April - 6 May 1994); operations of the voluntary fund, and the Sustainable Development Technology Exhibition.

COLOMBIA: Alfredo Rey, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, expressed solidarity with and understanding of the particular situation of SIDS. Economic development of SIDS is limited by dense populations and their impact on the environment; the small size of domestic markets and the difficulty of penetrating international markets; and the costs of transportation. He called for a triangular model of national, regional and international initiatives.

VANUATU: Amb. Robert van Lierop, speaking on behalf of the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS), insisted that the issues to be discussed are so important that this opportunity cannot be squandered. The unique circumstances, vulnerabilities and limitations of SIDS will be the specific focus throughout the process of this Conference. Participants need to address the implementation of Agenda 21 in relation to SIDS. SIDS are diverse yet share certain characteristics: small size and relative geographic remoteness, a narrow range of resources, severe population stress, sometimes minimal renewable freshwater resources and high degrees of endemism. Some believe that SIDS benefit from important overseas development assistance, however, statistical tools fail to reflect the reality of the situation as their costs are considerably higher due to the lack of economies of scale.

SIDS have much to contribute to the post-UNCED process. Coral reefs are the marine equivalent of tropical rainforests and of equal importance. SIDS, having contributed very little to the phenomenon of global warming, are the most vulnerable to its adverse consequences. Project funding is often denied to SIDS on account of their small size and perceived lack of global benefit. However, in the case of SIDS, local benefits have a global impact. The exclusive economic zones of many SIDS contain important fish stocks on which the world is increasingly dependent.

Existing programmes could be enhanced and new measures considered to implement policies. The powerful forces of the market can be used, but consumers and producers need to have accurate information and pricing mechanisms. Regional and international organizations have a crucial role to play in applying international environmental law. Protection of coral reefs requires more effective coastal zone management against pollution, erosion and sedimentation. SIDS are the victim of both a lack of awareness by the international community and too much inappropriate attention. SIDS are willing to do more than

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they expect from others, but ask that their needs and priorities be taken seriously by all.

BELGIUM: Herman Portocarero spoke on behalf of the European Community and its member States. SIDS benefit from higher levels of ODA than other developing countries. Structural improvements take place more quickly and populations include large colonies of expatriates who contribute to the economies. Thus, SIDS can assume the major role in working for their own development. He urged the PrepCom to avoid abstract discussions and address real problems and possible solutions.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: Amb. Lionel Hurst called for a vulnerability index to replace the GNP per capita measurement, which distorts the real situation of SIDS, where higher costs per capita are incurred in providing routine services such as safe drinking water and electricity. This index, which would take the environment into account when defining development status, would provide SIDS with more equitable access to financial systems.

AUSTRALIA: Charles Mott mentioned Australian contributions toward this process, including the funding of a Secretariat staff member (with New Zealand) and the contribution of \$A200,000 for the participation in the PrepCom and Conference of representatives from SIDS. In the programme of action for the Conference, Australia supports an effective partnership between SIDS, bilateral contributors, regional and international organizations, NGOs and major groups. He stressed the importance of encouraging SIDS to integrate sustainable development objectives within their planning processes; securing better performances by regional and international organizations; and enabling the UN to establish the capacity to promote sustainable development in SIDS.

BARBADOS: Amb. Besley Maycock said evaluation of sustainable development of SIDS could prove to be a real life laboratory. Clear definition of vulnerabilities and major constraints to sustainable development are well known to island communities, but not yet the focus of the international community. In the case of SIDS, there is no difference between coastal management and general development planning. There is no margin of error or second chances. SIDS will suffer disproportionately from climate change and sea-level rise poses a threat of potential loss of the entire territory. Much work still needs to be done on the relationship between ecological considerations and development. Specific concerns of SIDS are poorly understood and responded to in a fragmented way. The Barbados Conference will be a first step in an ongoing process.

MARSHALL ISLANDS: Amb. Carl Heine urged the international community to respect the SIDS Conference, as this is a matter of survival for many islanders. Island people will not remain silent any more when international issues such as marine dumping and nuclear testing in the Pacific affect their lives.

ITALY: Amb. Francesco Paolo Fulci announced Italy's contribution of approximately US\$100,000 to the voluntary fund. He listed the following areas in which his delegation is ready and able to contribute: integrated coastal management; cooperation for the protection of regional seas; preservation of historic sites; exploitation of geothermal power; regional access to remote sensing systems; and the study and development of low-cost sea-going vessels;

CANADA: Claude Baillargeon said that environment and development problems are often magnified in SIDS owing to their small size and limited resources. In this respect, they are a microcosm of our world. The fragility of island ecosystems compels us to take their particularities into consideration. Fisheries are an important element for SIDS and the efforts carried out by Canada on the management of high seas fisheries will, if they succeed, have a positive effect on SIDS.

UNITED STATES: Maureen Walker recommended that other fora, where related issues are being discussed, be used to craft an integrated approach to the sustainable development of SIDS. She referred to the US experience with integrated coastal zone management and the lessons learned that may be applied within the context of this Conference.

NEW ZEALAND: Priscilla Williams said that the size, isolation and environmental vulnerability of SIDS are unique and this Conference offers an opportunity to identify strategies. Rather than finding new aid categories, this Conference should attempt to maximize existing levels of assistance. Regional coordination is crucial. Everyone involved should exercise tolerance and flexibility. She also clarified New Zealand's various financial contributions to the Conference.

FIJI: Amb. Ratu Manasa K. Seniloli highlighted the consequences of natural disasters on SIDS and the fact that the frequency, and possibly the severity, of storms and hurricanes is expected to increase with climate change. This will have major implications for those seeking insurance coverage as many insurance companies have already started to pull out of a number of South Pacific islands and have drastically increased rates in other regions. He took issue with the report of the Secretary-General (PC/10) as it contains descriptive information and is relatively modest in its provision of conclusions and recommendations.

JAPAN: Takao Shibata expressed Japan's empathy with the plight of SIDS (Japan being composed of a series of small islands). He drew the PrepCom's attention to the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction to be held in Yokohama City in May 1994 as part of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: This morning's meeting is scheduled to begin at 10:00 am in the Trusteeship Council Chamber. The first item of business will be consideration of agenda item 2(d) "Participation of non-governmental organizations in the preparatory process." The PrepCom will be asked to adopt A/CONF.167/PC/L.4, which lists 68 NGOs that have requested accreditation. Following a decision on this item, the Plenary will return to the general debate. Statements are expected this morning from Israel, Mauritius, China, Micronesia, UNESCO and WHO. In the afternoon, look for statements from Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire and Kiribati. If the general debate concludes early enough this afternoon, UN agencies may present their statements relevant to A/CONF.151/PC/6, "Overview of system-wide activities relevant to General Assembly resolution 47/189."

Look for an announcement today from Amb. Wensley about a change in the Bureau. The new Vice-Chair from Romania will be Jon Barac, as Marian Dinu has been posted to Washington.

IN THE CORRIDORS: Look for activity in the corridors in preparation for Thursday's expected presentation of a draft programme of action. This document is being drafted by a working group composed of AOSIS countries led by Cuba. The draft text is likely to be presented today to the G-77 for its consideration. They hope that this draft will serve as the basis for further discussion during informal consultations later this week. Look for this document to propose the establishment of a Small Islands Technical Assistance Programme with an office within the UN system and a series of regional Centres for Sustainable Development.

AT THE HELMSLEY HOTEL: AOSIS invites all Conference participants (including NGOs) to an "Island Night" reception this evening from 6:30-8:30 pm in the Knickerbocker Suites at the Helmsley Hotel, 212 E. 42nd Street.