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PREPCOM HIGHLIGHTS TUESDAY, 31 AUGUST 1993

The Preparatory Committee met in plenary session for the second day of general debate on Agenda Items 2(a) and 3, activities of the UN system in preparation for the Conference and consideration of plans and programmes to support the sustainable development of small island developing States (SIDS). The PrepCom also addressed Agenda Item 2(d), participation of NGOs in the preparatory process. Pursuant to this agenda item, the PrepCom adopted document A/CONF.167/PC/L.4, accrediting 68 NGOs.

GENERAL DEBATE

ISRAEL: Daniel Ayalon expressed Israel's solidarity with SIDS. He explained Israel's long tradition of technical cooperation with developing countries, including SIDS, in the areas of agriculture, education, rural and community development, medicine and public health. In the past year and a half, Israel has hosted 171 experts from the islands for specialized training and has sent experts abroad for six "on-the-spot" courses with 140 participants.

MAURITIUS: Amb. Sateeanund Peerthum indicated that the work of this Conference is of crucial importance and its success depends on the SIDS themselves as well as the international community. The oceans are of primordial importance to SIDS and Mauritius, as Chair of the environmental committee of the Indian Ocean Commission, is very active in this regard. He highlighted the rational management of freshwater resources, solid waste management, integrated coastal management, and natural and man-made disaster preparedness as important issues. These concerns should be integrated in both SIDS development strategies and regional cooperation.

CHINA: Amb. Li Zhaoxing noted that the sustainable development of SIDS is an essential part of a global effort and, therefore, the international community must take its responsibilities seriously. The measure of the success of this Conference will be the extent to which it can turn the Rio agreements into practical, action-oriented programmes that benefit SIDS. Priorities should include creating favorable conditions for sustainable development in SIDS by: removing external environmental threats; enhancing data and information exchange; strengthening regional cooperation; and human resource capacity building. South-South cooperation should also be reinforced. The international community should fulfill its Rio obligations with respect to technology transfer and financial resources.

MICRONESIA: Asterio R. Takesy, Secretary for Resources and Development, prefaced his statement with a comment on the presence and vital contribution of the press to the success of this Conference. He stressed that this is not a cleverly designed pledging conference. The world community

should focus on SIDS because the problems they face are real and life-threatening. He described the situation on the 600 atolls and islands that comprise the Federated States of Micronesia and highlighted problems with recent storms, changing ocean temperatures that are causing serious periods of drought, sea-level rise and population growth.

ROMANIA: Ion Barac mentioned that SIDS do not form a homogeneous group but are also distinguished by their own identities and characteristics. They still present a strong case for special attention by the international community, both from an environmental and a development point of view. This Conference is only a first step and it should result in a blueprint for action.

COOK ISLANDS: Wayne Tamangaro King reminded the participants that sustainable development is not a new concept for SIDS, where people have always lived in harmony with their environment. Societies have evolved and are now threatened with the loss of their memory and culture. In many SIDS the coastal zone is in fact the totality of the island. Tourism provides economic benefits, yet also poses a problem of social acceptance on the part of the islanders.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO: Evans King referred to the important work undertaken by UNCTAD and stated that the programme of action to be agreed on in Barbados may contain ideas that can be replicated in other countries. Many programmes are already underway at national levels, despite high per capita costs. However, the support of the international community is essential, especially in providing access to environmentally-sound technology, financial resources and funding mechanisms. Technology transfer is particularly important in the areas of communication, energy conservation and the development of efficient, alternative energy sources.

KIRIBATI: Nakibae Teuatabo acknowledged the goodwill shown by the international community in assisting SIDS, but urged developed countries to go further. Priority needs to be given to the development of natural resources, particularly marine resources. Capacity building also needs to be highlighted.

WHO: Louis Laugerl, representative of the World Health Organization, said that SIDS have always been a priority for WHO. SIDS can serve as a model for other developing countries, in areas such as water distribution, water quality and control of waterborne diseases. It is essential to emphasize effective support of communities, emergency preparedness and appropriate responses to sea-level rise.

UNDCP: Sylvie Alpert Bryant, representative of the UN International Drug Control Programme, indicated that some Caribbean SIDS are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of drug trafficking and in some islands huge budgetary resources have to be earmarked to combat it. In that respect, drug abuse control stands in the way of sustainable

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development. While in the Pacific the effects of drug traffic are slowly being felt, the situation is more acute in the Caribbean, which also suffers from drug abuse and associated crime. It is important to strengthen the regional ability to cope with this new reality. The UNDCP has several master plans in preparation to strengthen local enforcement, heighten awareness and train human resources.

IOC: Dr. George Maul, representative of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, highlighted the role oceanography and other marine sciences can play in the sustainable development of SIDS. This was confirmed by UNCED. The Conference must address the immediate threats facing small island States on a daily basis, i.e., sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and depletion of marine resources. The IOC intends to facilitate international scientific cooperation to provide coastal managers with the relevant scientific information.

NIUE: Wayne Tagelagi presented the first statement ever at the United Nations from the South Pacific island of Niue. He highlighted a few areas of special concern. Lack of human resources is a real problem in Niue, where the population is only 2,500 people. Development of the private sector is a priority. However, lack of infrastructure and transportation difficulties are major constraints. He stressed the need for transfer of technology, specifically remote sensing systems that aid in the detection of meteorological conditions and enhance natural disaster preparedness.

ARGENTINA: Oscar Avasle stated that one of the main problems at this Conference is that of defining in concrete terms the best way to implement the Rio agreements. The task is to move from ideological agreement to actual implementation. This Conference is one of the first steps along this path. He stressed the need to examine the commitments made regarding international economic cooperation, financial resources and mechanisms, and capacity building aimed at achieving sustainable development.

CUBA: Pedro Luis Pedrosa Cuesta referred to the cycle of natural disasters that has devastated the Cuban economy in the past year, as an example of the vulnerability of SIDS. While recognizing their individual responsibilities, SIDS cannot achieve sustainable development without assistance from the international community. In particular there should be better coordination of UN agencies in natural disaster relief and better targeted financial assistance. The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) should play a key role in the ongoing analysis that will follow Barbados.

JAMAICA: Amb. Lucille Mathurin Mair said that SIDS are particularly vulnerable to the effects of intensive activity in the coastal zone, tourism, an increase in population density, commercial agricultural activities, as well as natural disasters. Due to their limitations, SIDS need to develop vulnerability indices at the regional level. The eventual entry into force of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) will increase the ability of SIDS to manage their marine resources. International cooperation will be instrumental in developing an interdisciplinary approach to the sustainable development of SIDS. NGO activities are also essential to ensure that all sectors participate in the process.

BRAZIL: Regis Arslanian said this Conference must recognize the significance of international cooperation, new and additional financial resources, and transfer of environmentally-sound technology. Access to financial resources has been highlighted in Agenda 21 but does not appear clearly enough in the documents prepared by the Secretariat. The crucial question of financial resources must be addressed frankly.

UNCTAD: Abdulqawi A. Yusuf, the representative from the UN Conference on Trade and Development, pointed out that the UN has designated UNCTAD as the focal point for specific action at the global level in favor of island developing countries. The outcome of the Conference will be judged by the impact it will have on sustainable development and trade-related issues for SIDS. Environmental as well as international economic changes limit options for SIDS.

Although the basic constraints on the sustainable development of SIDS arise from their vulnerabilities, external factors also play a role. These include the globalization of production, the emergence of new economic spaces, new forms of competition, innovations in international shipping, and the increasing importance of micro-electronics and telecommunications. Economically, it is desirable to internalize externalities. International cooperation is needed to support sound environmental policies and remove trade distortions.

ILO: Ian Chambers of the International Labour Organisation said that SIDS, like so many other countries, are beset by increasing unemployment. There is a need to balance the need for sound environmental management with employment generation. Both the public and private sectors need to recognize the potential for environment-related employment, particularly in the tourism industry, a mainstay of many SIDS' economies. ILO standard-setting in chemical hazards, the working environment and industrial disasters is important and SIDS' needs and concerns are being taken into account.

UNEP: Arthur Lyon Dahl mentioned that all SIDS participate in UNEP's regional seas programmes and it is important for this Conference to build on existing mechanisms and increase cooperation among them. Document A/CONF.167/PC/6 refers to UNEP activities, but the programmes are currently being restructured in response to Agenda 21. The PrepCom should look at what can be done to improve information exchange and build up a database from which all SIDS could benefit. A network can also be set up to allow decision makers to predict the effects of the policies they might adopt.

NGOS: Jocelyn Dow, on behalf of NGOs from small island States in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans and the Mediterranean and Caribbean Seas, said the question of their very survival has been determined by others. There are still peoples who are fighting for the right of decolonization and self-determination. Current patterns of industrial production, distribution and resource use shred the fabric of traditions and create in their stead new forms of poverty, social instability and dependence. There is a need to shift the focus of development policies away from the narrow parameters of macro financial indicators to a more meaningful and sustainable process wherein growth is measured increasingly by the human index indicators that UNDP reports have recently begun to adopt.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: General debate will continue on Agenda Items 2(a) and 3 today. Statements are expected from Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Maldives, Malta, Solomon Islands, Grenada, UNESCO, WMO, UNDP, FAO, ITU and the Intergovernmental Committee on the Convention on Biological Diversity (ICCBD). After exhausting the speakers' list, Plenary will proceed with a closer examination of A/CONF.167/PC/6 and the Chair will invite delegates to make specific statements. There will be no speakers' list. If time permits, the Plenary will discuss the reports of the regional technical meetings (A/CONF.167/PC/7 and 8). In the afternoon, general debate on Agenda Items 2(a) and 3 will continue. Speakers will include Iceland, Samoa, Bahamas, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Commonwealth Secretariat, Regional Commissions, and Solomon Islands Development Trust.

Several informal documents may be circulated today. The G-77 may introduce a document, "Referential Elements for an Action Programme." This document will draw on the common elements of the reports of the two regional technical meetings (A/CONF.167/PC/7 and 8) and may serve as a guide for discussion. AOSIS has been preparing a draft framework action programme for the environmental management of SIDS. At the same time, the EC is developing constructive points for discussion, which may or may not be tabled.