

THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SIDS HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 1 SEPTEMBER 2014

The Third International Conference on SIDS began its proceedings in Apia, Samoa, with a formal opening plenary followed by a general debate, which continued through the afternoon. Also in the afternoon, a multi-stakeholder partnership dialogue took place on the theme of 'sustainable economic development.' Numerous side events were held through the day and evening.

OPENING PLENARY

Wu Hongbo, Conference Secretary-General and UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, expressed appreciation to the Government of Samoa for their conference arrangements.

Organizational Matters: Delegates elected, by acclamation, Tuilaepa Aiono Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of Samoa, as President of the Conference. They also adopted the agenda (A/CONF.223/1) and rules of procedure (A/CONF.223/2), and elected 14 country representatives as Conference Vice-Presidents: Benin, Mauritius and Tanzania from Africa; Japan and the Maldives from the Asia-Pacific; Estonia and Romania from Eastern Europe; the Bahamas, Barbados and Mexico from Latin America and the Caribbean; and Germany, Spain and Turkey from the Western Europe and Others Group. Conference President Malielegaoi noted that one more representative of Eastern Europe remains to be elected. Delegates also elected Fonotoe Nuafesili Pierre Laufofo, Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa, as *ex officio* Vice-President. Milan Mehtarbhan, Permanent Representative of Mauritius to the UN, was appointed Rapporteur-General.

Delegates then adopted the organization of work, including the establishment of subsidiary bodies, and other organizational matters (A/CONF.223/4). They approved the participation of the intergovernmental organizations listed in A/CONF.223/5: the Caribbean Telecommunications Union, the South Pacific Tourism Organization, and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

The Conference approved representatives of Belgium, China, Colombia, Gabon, Guyana, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Tanzania and the US to serve on the Credentials Committee.

Conference President Malielegaoi welcomed delegates to Samoa. He said the UN Climate Summit to be held in September 2014 in New York, US, should send a clear signal to delegates to make UNFCCC COP 21 in Paris a 'conference of hope', with an ambitious climate treaty agreed in 2015. He emphasized that the designation of 2014 as the International Year of SIDS is the first

time a group of countries has been accorded such recognition, and that adopting the SAMOA Pathway months before the Conference is a unique occurrence in the UN context.

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, said the world should prioritize achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in SIDS, and reaching meaningful agreement on the post-2015 development agenda and a global climate treaty that reflects the needs of SIDS. He called on leaders to come to the UN Climate Summit in New York "with bold announcements." The SAMOA Pathway, he said, "provides a road that we must travel together," underscoring the UN System as a reliable partner in the work ahead.

John Ashe, UN General Assembly President, emphasized that this conference comes at a crucial time as the world is fashioning a new international development agenda, and called on leaders to put something on the table at the 2014 Climate Summit.

Baron Divavesi Waqa, President of Nauru and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), underscored that success requires long-term commitments and partnerships. He requested more discipline from partners to fulfill long-standing commitments so that SIDS can effectively plan their future. He encouraged international and regional networks to establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure actions do not "veer off course."

Martin Sajdik, President, UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), stressed that the international community has a special responsibility to SIDS. He outlined the work of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and ECOSOC in supporting partnerships, and urged creating a space for effective civil society engagement.

Wu Hongbo, Conference Secretary-General, noted that islands face many natural disasters. He lauded them for providing innovative solutions despite their limited resources, and underscored the importance of the conference in providing a platform for the international community to engage on these issues.

On behalf of the nine Major Groups, Lemalu Nele Leilua, Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations, provided an overview of the pre-conference Major Groups and other Stakeholders Forum, and said that discussions stressed that partnerships should be at the center of the conference outcomes. Noting the wealth of knowledge within Major Groups, she said that the forum called for, *inter alia*: affirming the sustainable development goals on gender equality; mainstreaming the rights of indigenous peoples in the SAMOA Pathway; emphasizing the importance of youth for progress; taking urgent and ambitious action on adaptation, mitigation, and loss and damage; adopting good governance and appropriate legislative mechanisms; facilitating technology transfer; and integrating cross-cutting issues.



GENERAL DEBATE

The general debate consisted of statements by heads of state and government representatives from SIDS as well as from partner governments. For the webcast of speakers' interventions, please see <http://webtv.un.org>.

Many statements highlighted the development challenges facing SIDS, particularly climate change, and outlined domestic sustainable development initiatives. Calls were made to improve the management capacity and effectiveness of partnerships, and for the needs of SIDS to be better reflected in international partnerships. Twenty countries made interventions, including 15 heads of state and government. The Coral Triangle Initiative on coral reefs, fisheries and food security was mentioned as a possible partnership model. A partnership was announced between the Comoros, New Zealand and UNDP for the development of renewable energy.

Bolivia, for G-77/CHINA, said that SIDS challenges undermine sustainable development for all. She noted the need for integrating sustainability across all policies and programmes.

The EU highlighted key areas for potential regional SIDS partnerships in energy, healthy oceans, biodiversity, food and nutrition security, and the post-2015 development agenda, noting a number of successful projects where the EU has partnered with SIDS in the energy sector.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUE: SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Freundel Stuart, Prime Minister of Barbados, opened the session, saying that while income levels differ among SIDS, the vulnerabilities that they face are shared. He said that economic development should be decoupled from environmental degradation, in order for it to become sustainable. Calling for a strengthening of partnerships among Member States, he said that capacity building and investment in infrastructure development are key priorities for SIDS.

Henry Puna, Prime Minister, Cook Islands, called for protecting shared fisheries and abundant minerals through sustainable ocean development. He announced partnerships to upgrade water infrastructure, and to transform the energy sector.

Keith Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada, said sustainable economic development is now synonymous with job and wealth creation. Focusing on the need for investment in renewable energy, he spoke of the value-for-money partnerships available in SIDS. He announced that the US has selected Grenada as a pilot country for the Caribbean Energy Security Initiative.

Murray McCully, Minister of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand, noted his country's foreign assistance places a strong emphasis on sustainable development. He underscored the importance of having strong partnerships and choosing sustainable initiatives.

ECOSOC President Sadjik called for ensuring that partnership mechanisms are a part of the post-2015 development agenda.

Rolph Payet, Minister of Environment and Energy, the Seychelles, provided an overview of his country's 'debt-for-nature' initiative to generate additional financial resources, while lowering the debt ceiling.

Zhu Min, Deputy Managing Director, International Monetary Fund (IMF), emphasized the organization's support for: monetary and fiscal policies; concessional loans for low-income countries; working with states beyond graduation; and sustainable growth.

Discussion: Cletus Springer, Department of Sustainable Development, Organization of American States, moderated the discussion.

Jamaica underscored the importance of regional integration, stating that by pooling resources and skills, economic development can be enhanced. The Maldives said the international community

should create partnership opportunities with SIDS, as their progress made in sustainable development is under threat, including as a result of some SIDS graduating to middle-income country status.

Tuvalu said it requires genuine and durable partnerships for human resource development, stressing the need for developing technical and labor skills.

Australia announced a partnership with the company Carnival Australia to create tourism jobs in Pacific islands.

The US announced its ALOHA Plus Challenge initiative in Hawaii, which works across the public and private sectors to address issues, including clean energy, global food production, natural resource management, climate resilience, green jobs creation and education.

Chile outlined a project to improve youth employability in the Dominican Republic, which focuses on diversifying access to microcredit and improving skills.

The International Labour Organization announced a partnership focusing on road and infrastructure in rural areas to create jobs in key industries. The UN Environment Programme said that its focus for SIDS has been on green economy and sustainable consumption and production.

The UN Office for South-South Cooperation announced its new partnership, the South-South Technology Transfer Facility for SIDS, which is a joint mechanism for a technology transfer facility for SIDS.

The World Bank highlighted its work in the fisheries, telecommunications and aviation sectors. The International Trade Centre announced three partnerships, which aim to encourage the economic empowerment of women in the Pacific region.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean announced a new partnership, 'Strengthening the Technical Capacity of Public Finance Managers in Caribbean SIDS to Manage their Public Finances.' He said that the initiative works with Caribbean partners to design better and more efficient public management systems.

The UN Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States announced various multi-stakeholder partnerships in the following areas: technology to protect maritime resources; business contingency models in disasters; organic products and food security; Pacific sustainable tourism development; and renewable, affordable and reliable energy.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Following a rousing welcoming ceremony on the eve of the Conference, the first day of business was characterized by a positive and relaxed atmosphere with participants forgoing suits and ties for more laid back island attire. Despite the relaxed atmosphere, several delegates noted that the SIDS conference occurs at "a critical moment" for the international community.

A number of delegates hoped that with the SAMOA Pathway document agreed months earlier in New York, the Conference would focus on forging partnerships, new initiatives and innovative solutions to sustainable development in SIDS, rather than negotiating "down to the last comma and paragraph number," as a delegate noted. Meanwhile, AOSIS delegates engaged in closed-door negotiations on an Apia Declaration, the political declaration of the Conference.

With over 300 partnerships and initiatives expected to be announced during the Conference and partnership dialogues continuing on Tuesday morning, many delegates were looking for concrete commitments and pledges, signaling the political will to address these challenges and to carry this momentum over to the UN Secretary-General's Climate Summit in just under three weeks in New York.