

Statement by HE Ambassador Enele Sopoaga, Vice-Chairman of AOSIS, on behalf of AOSIS, on the outcomes of the Mauritius International Meeting

In the absence of His Excellency the Permanent Representative of Mauritius, the Chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States Ambassador Jagdish Koonjul, and in my capacity as Vice-Chairman of AOSIS, I have the honor to make present some viewpoints from our group. This statement will build upon our introductory statement to the opening session of the CSD. I would also point out that the MSI to give us a most important reaffirmation, namely that of integration. Water, sanitation and human settlements are very important topics for AOSIS. From physical and geographic perspective the special needs of SIDS can be observed. But it is also important that we bear in mind that the MSI has reaffirmed the special case for SIDS for sustainable development, and that SIDS must integrate sectors in order to achieve resilience building in the face of their vulnerabilities. Water, sanitation and human settlements present us with just such opportunities for integration. For example in the smaller islands, having water catchment systems attached to housing is an important strategy, either with household storage facilities or aquifer recharge. It is also important to integrate water and sanitation, to reduce the amount of water used and to avoid contamination of the aquifer. In this regard, there are some differences of situation between SIDS, in terms of how these challenges are actually expressed for individual SIDS. Our Member States will raise some of these particular regional or geo-physical specificities as this High Level Segment progresses, in compliance with your various questions.

AOSIS is by no means complacent about these challenges. As I mentioned these sectors are very important for SIDS, and are underpinned in our view by the overarching issue of SIDS vulnerability. Any effort by SIDS to address actions and policies under these sectors must take our special situations and our vulnerability into account. Indeed it is the cross-cutting issue of resilience building which is to our groups so important. AOSIS recently participated in a workshop on “Building the economic resilience of small states”, organized by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the University of Malta Islands and Small States Institute held in Gozo, Malta. The workshop requested that AOSIS urge the CSD to “take note of the special situation of SIDS in the context of the outcomes of this workshop and to request the international donor community to support SIDS in their resilience-building efforts”. The workshop also urged “relevant UN agencies, including the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), to continue providing support to small states, particularly SIDS, towards the promotion of sustainable development in general and resilience building in particular; in this regard, special reference was made to the UNDP Resilience Building Facility, established at the Mauritius International Meeting to assist SIDS in their efforts to cope with their inherent vulnerabilities and to build their resilience.” Finally the workshop called for the “international donor community, including multilateral financial organisations, to extend financial and technical support to small states in their efforts to cope with their inherent vulnerability and to build their resilience.”

The workshop concluded that “the inherent economic vulnerabilities of small states have been internationally recognized. Such vulnerability arises from exposure to adverse external shocks beyond the country’s control, as well as structural handicaps, exacerbated by inter alia a high degree of openness, export concentration and high dependence on strategic imports, remoteness and high transport costs, susceptibility to natural disasters and climate change. Although these conditions pose serious handicaps for the sustainable economic development of small states, participants noted that a number of small states have been able to mitigate the effects of these difficulties through appropriate policy orientations focused on building resilience.” In this regard it will therefore be important for CSD to support resilience building in SIDS.

The nexus of water and sanitation issues for SIDS is as I have mentioned very much related to our resilience building requirements. As noted in the preparatory meeting of CSD, water and sanitation have a particular set of elements that are peculiar to SIDS. Some relate to our finite size and catchment area for water, as well as for our possibilities for storage and disposal. Size and oceanic location do govern our water and sanitation regimes. Climate change is also an aspect.

The potential harmful effects of global climate change in islands require an immediate, urgent application of science and technology to provide coping strategies related to rising sealevel and the increased frequency and duration of droughts and floods. It has been scientifically documented that global temperatures are increasing faster than at any other time in the past thousand years. Glaciers and ice caps are melting at historically unprecedented rates, contributing to rising sealevel. General circulation models (GCMs) reveal that natural phenomena such as volcanic eruptions and forest fires cannot explain the unprecedented warming. Accordingly, a report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2001 stated that human activity almost certainly caused most of the Earth’s warming during the past century. Several GCMs have been developed that predict substantial modification of existing climate patterns in response to carbon-dioxide increases in the atmosphere. These models indicate that precipitation distribution will be markedly altered in the tropics, with rainfall diminished over the tropical oceans, islands, and coastal areas.

Finally, it is widely recognized that extremes in weather may be the most significant impacts of climate change. Flooding from increases in the magnitude and frequency of rainfall, combined with stronger, more frequent hurricanes and storm surges can be expected. Equally disturbing will be the length and severity of droughts. Clearly, these environmental changes portend an ominous future for the island-nations and coastal areas of the world. More than 100 million people worldwide live within three feet of mean sea level. By 2100, sealevel is expected to rise three feet, mainly from expanded warmer ocean water and melting glaciers and ice caps. Application of science and technology within SIDS for developing strategies to build resilience to natural disasters caused by extreme weather events must be institutionalized as soon as possible.

One of the more serious consequences of diminished rainfall near tropical oceans would be a reduction in the occurrence and availability of fresh surface-water and groundwater

resources. These hydrologic depletions could result from a variety of global-warming effects including reduced frequency, duration, and intensity of rainfall, increases in solar radiation and air temperature, changes in temperature and movement of ocean currents, and increases in sealevel. Every inch of sealevel rise could result in eight feet of horizontal retreat of sandy beach shoreline due to erosion, with dramatic implications for our human settlements.

A recommendation for action emanating from the MIM is that there is the need for CSD to continue to be the forum for reviewing the implementation of the BPOA and the MSI. We have requested that a special committee be set up under CSD for this purpose in our resolution adopting the MSI being currently before the General Assembly. This permanent working group, with the appropriate secretariat support from DESA and the SIDS Unit in particular, would be the best format for addressing SIDS issues in a meaningful way for each CSD session.

AOSIS feels that this review should not only include the topics of the day for CSD, but also new and emerging issues, specific progress or major obstacles to progress. It is the view of AOSIS that the sessions of the CSD should review progress in the implementation of the BPOA and the MSI on a regular and predictable basis. This would entail that certain special consideration be given to the SIDS specific elements related to the thematic topics. We do not expect that the working group reviews all aspects of the BPOA and the MSI each year. Rather, the working group should receive reports on progress and obstacles to sustainable development in SIDS related to that years thematic cluster as well as for any major new developments in SIDS sustainable development efforts.

I thank you Mr Chairman.