

Statement by His Excellency Ambassador Tuiloma Neroni Slade, Permanent Representative of Samoa to the United Nations, Chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States, in the General Debate of the 2nd Committee of the 55th United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, and to congratulate you and your bureau on your election.

This year the 2nd Committee will have a very busy schedule, and our group of countries wish to take this opportunity to highlight the most important aspects of this years' agenda. We will return to each of these issues with detailed proposals at the appropriate time. However, we are of the view that this general debate will allow us the opportunity to raise some fundamental and principled positions of our group, and that this would be of assistance to other delegations in understanding our motivations and initiatives.

The AOSIS countries fully subscribe to the views put forward by the Chairman of the Group of 77 and China earlier today. As developing countries we are supporting all the points that he has raised on our behalf. My statement is therefore merely a further elaboration to indicate where the special situation of Small Island Developing States requires us to give appropriate consideration.

Mr. Chairman last year the General Assembly held its 22nd Special Session to give its consideration and appraisal of the implementation of the Barbados Program of Action. AOSIS delegations participated at the highest level, and we are confident that the General Assembly afforded us a valuable opportunity to discuss the state of progress so far. The emphasis was clearly placed on the validity of the BPoA as a living framework for sustainable development in SIDS. The specific constraints of SIDS, and the need for particular support were also given its proper recognition. The negotiated consensus outcome is therefore a welcome step forward in the implementation of the BPoA by the international community. Because that is where, Mr. Chairman, that the General Assembly found the biggest gaps. While it is clear that SIDS have made remarkable efforts to promote sustainable development with some international support, however, in many cases it was equally clear that many SIDS are still dependent on the financial assistance and cooperation of the international community.

In order to promote its implementation in SIDS, the BPoA called on SIDS to formulate national action plans and environmental strategies, to carry out legislative reforms to fulfill environmental norms, and establish national institutions for sustainable development planning and project implementation. Many SIDS now have sustainable development councils and authorities, and many SIDS are now utilizing tools such as environmental impact assessment to protect the environment, in addition to implementing sustainable development projects. At the Special Session, SIDS representatives called attention to problems encountered and various constraints that have delayed the process of implementation, such as the Asian financial crisis, drought caused by El Nino, and

large natural disasters such as Hurricane Mitch. Lack of proper institutional and administrative capacity and skilled human resources have also hampered our ability to meet the demands of environmental management. On top of the domestic commitments of national sustainable development authorities, there are also international commitments to a growing number of treaties, be they regional or international. Our group of countries have made tremendous efforts, and it is now time for the international community to follow through.

Partnerships for further work

AOSIS fully endorses the principle of partnerships for sustainable development, as emphasized at the 22nd Special Session. We fully recognize that while it is up to SIDS to pursue sustainable development, all partners should foster an enabling environment. All partners should live up to their commitment to take further measures to support SIDS in this regard. Again, Mr. Chairman, the 22nd Special Session was quite succinct and to the point in its analysis of what is required. Because in the very difficult international trade and financial arena, SIDS find themselves very often marginalized. That being said there are some positive signs such as the recent signing of the Cotonou Agreement by the European Union and the ACP countries. It is also a very positive development that Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue and Tonga have now joined the ACP group, which means that the ACP now has nearly all the AOSIS Members on board. AOSIS is confident that the EU will commit substantial resources to sustainable development and capacity building in SIDS. In this regard it was a very positive step by the Government of Italy to sponsor a workshop on climate change that was held in Apia, Samoa in July and August of this year. The report of this workshop has been circulated as an official document of the United Nations.

It was also very positive to hear the announcement by the Government of Norway regarding their willingness to support capacity building for AOSIS. Norway has already provided substantial resources to strengthen the SIDS Unit and also to help secure the second stage of SIDSNet. In addition we have received with great appreciation the news that Norway will contribute to the capacity building workshops which we are planning for 2000 and 2001. It is our sincere hope that other donor countries will follow the good example that Norway has shown.

It is the view of AOSIS that partnerships and donor coordination are crucial to the success of the implementation of the BPoA. We must work much more concertedly to build on the efforts of the SIDS, and to support other ongoing activities, especially in the areas of capacity building and institutional strengthening.

Globalization

The 22nd Special Session recognized that SIDS face new challenges and opportunities from globalization. This was strongly reiterated by many of our Leaders during the Millennium Assembly, and cannot be emphasized enough. We can all understand that there are tremendous benefits in the global economy for SIDS, but we also know how difficult it is for many of us to access these benefits. In principle we are all in favor of a totally free and open market, but such a principled stand is a pyrrhic victory for

globalization if the end result is the re-colonization of SIDS by economic means. We are also very concerned about the losses we are incurring in our commodity sectors, and we fear that many bankrupt farmers will turn to other more lucrative, but illegal, crops to sustain their families. SIDS are willing to work out compromises, but we do feel that in the case of trade issues that the developed countries need to make some Solomonic decisions.

AOSIS is planning to hold a workshop on trade, environment and SIDS in 2001, and we are actively seeking support for this endeavor. In addition, we feel that the group has not received the fullest attention on trade matters from the UN system. While the BPoA mandated UNCTAD to strengthen its capacity to carry out research and analysis necessary to complement the work of the SIDS Unit, AOSIS is of the view that further efforts are needed. AOSIS will therefore propose that the post established at UNCTAD be seconded to the SIDS Unit, and we will introduce a proposal at the appropriate time.

Climate Change

This year the international community will gather in The Hague, Netherlands for the 6th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. A vastly complex and difficult set of decisions will be before the Conference that could make or break the environmental integrity of the Kyoto Protocol. AOSIS will press for an outcome that is fair, functional and dynamic, but which above all does not result in an overall increase in the amount of greenhouse gases that the atmosphere sees. We are also convinced that the time has come to provide better financial and technical support to SIDS and other vulnerable countries so that we can begin a more forward looking program for adaptation to climate change. COP6 is therefore an opportunity for the developed countries to live up to their commitments in terms of financial and technical support for technology transfer, capacity building, and science and research in the developing countries.

Biosafety

AOSIS welcomes the completion of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and many of our Members have signed the Protocol. The forthcoming meeting of the ICCP will be a first opportunity for our countries to formulate views and to prepare for the entry into force of the Protocol. In this regard AOSIS is planning a workshop prior to the ICCP meeting. The proposed workshop aims to build the capacity of SIDS to be better informed on the full implications of being a party to the Biosafety Protocol. The workshop intends to contribute to strengthening their capacities in this area to enable our Members to make informed decisions relating to the Protocol.

In anticipation of more SIDS signing and/or ratifying the Protocol, a concerted, systematic effort is required in SIDS to create greater awareness of the Biosafety Protocol and its implications. It will also be necessary to prepare for the first meeting of the ICCP, as we note the requirement for countries to develop national legislation to support the implementation of Protocol obligations at the national level. The workshop also aims to introduce participants to model biosafety legislation that can be used to fast track this requirement at the national level. Lastly, recognizing the need for capacity at the regional

level to coordinate regional biosafety activities, the workshop will provide an opportunity for SIDS to contribute to the development of a proposal for regional capacity building in this area.

AOSIS is very grateful to the Government of Norway for agreeing to sponsor this workshop, and also to the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis for hosting the event.

Capacity Building

Mr. Chairman, we have stated on many occasions that capacity building remains an overarching and crucial aspect not only for the BPoA, but for the ability of SIDS to make known our requirements and concerns. At the workshop we held in Apia, capacity building needs were discussed at great length by our most senior negotiators. We have as a result of this workshop produced a number of points that we have transmitted to the Global Environment Facility. These points have all been enumerated in the report from Apia, and we urge developed countries to closely consult this document.

SIDSNet

Mr. Chairman, the evolution of SIDSNet into a significant tool for sustainable development has been a source of pride for the Members of AOSIS. The professionalism of the staff and the willingness to assist SIDS is remarkable. However, AOSIS is very concerned that the survival of SIDSNet is contingent upon voluntary contributions. We applaud the Governments of Germany, Japan, Norway and Italy for providing funding, but the financing of SIDSNet should become part of the regular budget of the UN. AOSIS will propose such action at the appropriate time.

Mr. Chairman I thank you for the opportunity and look forward to working with you at this session of the 2nd Committee.