

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 2nd Committee of the 55th United Nations General Assembly, on agenda items relating to environment and sustainable development.

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.

The AOSIS countries fully subscribe to the views put forward by the Chairman of the Group of 77 and China earlier in our meetings. My statement will elaborate further on some of the matters raised in the general debate and also in the discussion held here and at other fora.

BPOA - the 22nd special session, trade and environment

Mr. Chairman the 22nd Special Session on the implementation of the Barbados Program of Action has been discussed in some detail in the general debate. Our countries have given substantial input to the Committee, which we wish to supplement with concrete proposals for action. AOSIS recognizes that the time has come for implementation at the international level to become more progressive. We have stated on many occasions that we fully recognize that it is up to SIDS to pursue sustainable development, but that 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, this has been agreed to by the General Assembly. Without this partnership SIDS will continue to find themselves being marginalized. There is recognition from within our group that the traditional means of development and trade support will have to be changed, but that acceptance does not in any way abrogate the needs. The considerations that we are requesting are not in our view unreasonable. There simply has to be some means available to take account of the special vulnerabilities of the SIDS. While the work on the vulnerability index is progressing, albeit slowly, the General Assembly has endorsed the following principled statement:

"... the international community reiterated its recognition of the specific constraints faced by small island developing States and the need for particular support in their efforts to advance sustainable development owing to their small size and remoteness, ecological fragility, vulnerability to climate change and economic vulnerabilities. ...Constraints to the sustainable development of small island developing States include a narrow resource base, which does not allow small island developing States to benefit from economies of scale; small domestic markets and heavy dependence on a few external and remote markets; high costs for energy, infrastructure, transportation, communication and servicing; long distances from export markets and import sources; low and irregular international traffic volumes; little resilience to natural disasters; rising populations; high volatility of economic growth; limited opportunities for the private sector and a proportionately large reliance of their economies on the public sector; and fragile natural environments."

Mr. Chairman there is very little else one can say that would summarize the logic and the clear reasoning for the need to take action at the international level. It simply begs the question, with all this understanding and goodwill, how come the international response has been so lukewarm?

That being said, we have had some positive responses from some donor countries. Our countries have gratefully acknowledged this. But is this a sustainable means for implementation of the international component of the Barbados Program of Action? Are we finally moving into a partnership that would create the enabling environment, which would create the investment in sustainable development in our countries? It is certainly 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. But this takes a renewed effort on behalf of our developed partners. I would like to reiterate that AOSIS is planning to hold a workshop on trade, environment and SIDS in 2001, and we are still 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 therefore proposes that the post established at UNCTAD be seconded to the SIDS Unit, so as to be available to the AOSIS Missions here in New York on a more regular basis.

Climate Change

The 6th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is looming large on our horizon. AOSIS has been involved in some of the informal consultations that have been carried out since the 13th session of the subsidiary bodies in Lyon. However, it remains our prime concern that the voices of the countries most vulnerable to climate change must be heard, since we have the most to lose in the various climate scenarios outlined for us. It is acknowledged by the world's most renowned scientists working with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that, unless there is concerted action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by significant levels, we will be committed to an unprecedented degree of climatic changes and extreme events. That is something AOSIS Members can not live with. We may not even survive such change.

Therefore Mr. Chairman, our delegations will strive above else to maintain the environmental integrity of the Kyoto Protocol and secure strong implementation of the existing commitments under the Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is our primary concern that our negotiations will result in real and measurable reductions in emissions, and that these reductions actually affect the amount of carbon concentration in the atmosphere. We therefore preclude any actions that could be construed as being merely temporary storage of carbon, such as forestry projects.

Other important issues before the Conference relate to adaptation to climate change. As we are seemingly doomed to experience some climate change, our countries wish to be as best prepared as they possibly can. With this in mind we wish to give firm guidance to

the GEF to begin work on more advanced stages of adaptation, independent of any political considerations that seem to have bogged down our debates so far.

Convention on Biological Diversity and Biosafety

Mr. Chairman, our countries have gained much from being Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Many of us have completed our first national communications to the CBD. In some countries the process of consultation for the national communications has resulted in a lot of community based activities such as local conservation areas. It has been a very worthwhile endeavor and we congratulate the CBD and GEF Secretariats for their support to our own regional and national institutions. But there is still much work to do, and new tasks are emerging. AOSIS welcomes the completion of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and looks forward to the first meeting in Montpellier in December this year. In this regard AOSIS is planning a workshop prior to that meeting. We need to make our membership more aware of the implications of the Protocol, as well as the requirements for countries to develop national legislation in support. We also see it as absolutely necessary for SIDS to contribute to the development of 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.

Convention to Combat Desertification

Mr. Chairman we are again seeing the inter-linkages between the various environmental treaties, but especially here in the context of the three sister conventions from Rio. We are becoming more and more aware of the different synergies that can be drawn together from an integrated approach to implementing these conventions. At the national and regional level our group of countries are well aware that for the purposes of capacity building there is much value in such an approach. We therefore acknowledge the work being done by the GEF together with the convention secretariats in this regard.

Specific information on the overall situation on drought and desertification in AOSIS Member States is still in early stages. A process of problems and needs assessment is planned in many regions, and it is expected that the implementation of this convention in our countries will soon take on greater momentum. AOSIS looks forward to the next Conference of the Parties to be held in Bonn this year.

Energy

Mr. Chairman, for SIDS the relationship between energy and sustainable development has been recognized for a number of sectors, in particular transportation, tourism and rural development. Furthermore, the 22nd special session of the UN General Assembly endorsed this linkage. In looking at the energy sector and in analyzing the energy services requirements – there is clearly a need for the delivery of technologies that are relevant to AOSIS needs, and this is clearly shown as being the priority for the group. Moreover, the need to maintain the environmental integrity of international agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol is also safeguarded in this manner.

AOSIS also recognizes that there are potential benefits in other areas – such as in employment generation, energy security, freshwater provision and coastal zone pollution reduction as ancillary benefits to such strategic approaches.

AOSIS is also cognizant of the size of the potential market for renewable energies and technologies are also broadly applicable across AOSIS regions and other developing countries. This overall agenda should be aimed at the implementation of energy efficiency policies and projects, and the development of renewable energy resources. This agenda would contribute significantly to the reduction of GHG emissions, reduce the amount of foreign exchange spent on the importation of fossil fuels, and would thereby increase the amount available for national economic development, assisting developing countries in achieving sustainable development.

What AOSIS is seeking to avoid by promoting this approach is to ensure that for example the mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol are designed in such a way that they do not reward “business-as-usual” projects. This principle is valid in all considerations of renewable energy in the context of sustainable development. It is furthermore the intention to see that the Kyoto Protocol does not result in higher global emissions than what would have been the case if the mechanisms had not been included in the Protocol. Furthermore the Kyoto Protocol should not be used as a mechanism for Annex I Parties to transfer outmoded or environmentally hazardous technologies under the pretext of climate protection. These concerns have led our members to propose that we need to ensure both that the international sustainable development debate prioritizes certain kinds of technologies, and that it excludes those that are environmentally unsound or do not provide long term sustainable development benefits.

But Mr. Chairman, we need to link the energy question to more than the Kyoto Protocol. It is for this reason that AOSIS welcomes the agenda for the 9th CSD. We intend to prepare well for this session, and will be convening a workshop in Cyprus in January next year. Let me express our sincere thanks to the Government of Cyprus for their generosity, as well as to the donor countries and agencies that have made this possible.

Faafetai Mr. Chairman.