



Statement on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)
First Session of the Preparatory Committee for the
Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States
22-26 January 2024

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States.

Co-chairs, thank you for convening us today and for your guidance and support and patience throughout this process.

As SIDS, we are home to some of the world's greatest ecological diversity, both on land and at sea. Our high incomes are critically unstable, lost after single events, or routinely diverted from development to recovery efforts. We are the stewards of the resources in 16% of the world's exclusive economic zones and sit in some of the most disaster-prone zones. The SIDS story is one of contrasts.

The particular challenges, especially those of a natural and economic nature, facing this group of countries leave them uniquely exposed. Today, SIDS are least 35% more vulnerable to external economic and financial shocks than other developing countries. It is this vulnerability to external shocks that has the greatest impact on their development. The recognition of this vulnerability by the international community in 1992 paved the way for a focused approach of support to SIDS. The three international meetings on SIDS since then have grown more comprehensive in their intention and more imperative in their need.

But in the thirty years of both this recognition and targeted action, the SIDS situation remains unchanged. Two considerations emerge here. First, the SIDS vulnerability is not one that can be done away with; there are not enough coffers to change who these countries are at their core. Our resilience can be built to better withstand external shocks but even that is not guaranteed. That brings us to the second consideration, the support to these countries is largely ad hoc and insufficient. The international community, while chasing crises tend to neglect those who need the most support.

In his statement to the opening of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, Maurice F. Strong, Secretary-General of the Conference said,

Perhaps the most important common ground we must arrive at in Rio is the understanding that we are all in this together. No place on the planet can remain 'an island of affluence in a sea of misery. We're either going to save the whole world or no-one will be saved...One part of the world cannot live an orgy of unrestrained consumption while the rest destroys its environment just to survive. Neither is immune from the effects of the other.

Strong's words are striking in their accuracy and resonate to the core.

In a world that seems intent on erecting walls and pigeonholing some countries, the risk of an avalanche of loss remains all too possible.

In four months, we, the international community will meet in Antigua and Barbuda to chart a course for the resilient prosperity of the small island and low-lying coastal developing states. The theme of that conference is astutely apt. The efforts of SIDS to ensure the development of their countries and people demands a greater collective stance at safeguarding resilience in these countries.

As in all other SIDS processes, AOSIS has approached the outcome of the Fourth Conference in a practical and deliverable manner. The international community need only to deliver in practice what we consistently advocate for, the sustainable development of all the world's countries.

The outcome is meant to be a uniquely SIDS manuscript. It expresses the SIDS story, situating SIDS as a special case for both environment and development, recognizing that despite the continued efforts of our countries, we continue to face the destabilizing effects of external shocks, at scales that relatively outpace others.

The outcome then builds a message of the development SIDS seek for themselves, and how the international community can help to make the SIDS-led, SIDS-focused agenda, achievable. Here, AOSIS has crafted language that looks to four critical points of departure – resilient economies, safe and prosperous societies, securing the SIDS future and advocating for environmental integrity and planetary sustainability. The resilient prosperity SIDS seek will not materialize without implementation across these four areas, noting their individual importance as well as the benefits they can collectively prompt.

To ensure success, the outcome proposes the means of implementation needed. These are intended to underpin and concretize action in both traditional and forward-looking ways. Here the support of our partners across the length and breadth of the world is imperative. **Bold action is needed, and it is needed now.**

Similarly, the support of the United Nations system is essential to deliver this ten-year outcome. The UN sits in a most unique position, through its presence in its global offices and on-the-ground in SIDS. AOSIS advocates for a new and more responsive UN for SIDS.

Throughout the regional and interregional preparatory meetings, the SIDS message was clear and consistent – SIDS survivability of the people, natural environments, and overall sustainable development is under threat. The development challenges we are facing are far outpacing our ability to respond. We are seemingly going from one event to another, without the time or ability to recover and regrow. We are running out of time and running out of space to maneuver. We sit here with you today with a single request, decide that the development of SIDS and our resilient prosperity provides a collective good, and let us act on that decision throughout the preparatory process for the Fourth Conference and the decade of action to come.

I thank you.