

AOSIS LEADERS MEETING 2024

⇒ Prime Minister's Opening Statement

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this year's SIDS Leaders' Meeting.

Each year brings its own challenges for our countries, but few stand out as critical points that can truly manifest change.

The decision to advance the Fund for Loss and Damage, the Agreement under UNCLOS on the BBNJ, the decision by the General Assembly to move ahead with the MVI, all within a SIDS year are reasons to celebrate. But 2024 has also shown us that the compounding impacts of climate change, the continued negative effects of plastic pollution, warming oceans and rising seas threaten our homelands in rapid and increasing ways. As SIDS leaders it can seem that for every move forward there remains a greater chasm to cross. For every dollar spent on recovery and loan repayments, we forego contributions to our future.

Our new ten-year framework, the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS), sets out in no uncertain terms the future we desire and need. The Summit of the Future, the UNFCCC's COP-29, and the Fourth Conference on Financing for Development ought to do the same, with specific calls that respond to the SIDS context and imperative. Also, the Declaration we will agree on today on sea-level rise and statehood, in advance of the High-Level Meeting on Sea Level Rise in a couple days sets out our interests and calls for our secure future.

Our discussions today, as in previous years, will focus on a few topical areas and emphasize the utmost importance of delivering for SIDS.

First, implementing the ABAS is key to our resilient development. The means of implementation, and the immediate need to establish the SIDS Center of Excellence are core to ABAS' success, and our own. These underpin the achievement of our more specific calls in other areas. We know that success will not only lie in the delivery of the big asks but also in the achievement of the entire text. A collective and inclusive coordination process will be essential to deliver overarching success. There should be no delay in delivering the ABAS.

The system of rules that governs who benefits from international goodwill is in dire need of reform. It is a point that developed and developing countries agree on. However, there remains a dichotomy in how this reform should unfold.

Second in our conversation today we will focus on how to unlock the finance we need to be resilient in the face of growing challenges. COP-29 and the Fourth Financing for Development Conference can be seen as leading processes, while the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index, Bridgetown Initiative, and the Debt Sustainability and Support Service, as proposed in ABAS, can be our immediate tools in this reform. Here there is no first and second act, these are complementary actions that can and should deliver immediate solutions.

Third, we know that our planet is changing. We have seen, first-hand, the relentless rise of sea levels on our islands. The impacts of this rise increase day by day. Consequently, we have been leaders in clarifying international law in this era of climate change. We are making sure that international law works for us—the smallest, but most effected states. Later this morning, we will discuss and then adopt our next step in the progressive development of the law—an AOSIS Declaration on Sea Level Rise and Statehood.

The world of 2024 is vastly different from that of 1994. It is not even the world of 2019. While we have moved beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, seen in recovered growth rates, we have not stretched beyond it. We have not yet learned how to forestall the next pandemic or resist the worst of a global crisis. We have not built back better or differently. As a global community, in many respects we seemed to have instead stumbled on an economic rebounding.

We wait with bated breath for the next event that will once again stall development, exacerbate hardship, and give credence to our vulnerability.

We envision a better future for ourselves.

As SIDS leaders, who govern some of the most remote and structurally vulnerable places, we know well how to survive. But, we also know that our people dream not only of surviving, but of thriving.

As we move towards the end of 2024, we should give no credence to more broken promises and delayed action by the international community. Instead, we should resolve to ignite a global movement that delivers the best, for everyone.

Esteemed leaders of AOSIS Member States, and our distinguished guests, let us reflect upon the profound journey that lies before us, which is burdened with hurdles but also brimming with opportunities as we chart our course to resilient prosperity. I hope we emerge from this meeting with a renewed vision of hope and a resounding “We can do this”.

We stand on the precipice of a revolution. Our development must remain our NorthStar.

I look forward to a robust conversation this morning culminating with a strong SIDS call to action.