



Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) on the Special Circumstances of Small Island Developing States

PREAMBLE

1. *Recalling* the longstanding recognition by the international community of the unique and particular vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), including in the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Agenda 21 and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and reaffirmed in the Barbados Programme of Action (1994), the Mauritius Strategy (2005), the SAMOA Pathway (2014), and the Antigua & Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (2024), including the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002) and the Future We Want (2012),
2. *Recalling the* continuous leadership of SIDS and our efforts to bring international attention to the predicament of SIDS, collectively beginning with the Small States Conference on Sea Level Rise, held in the Maldives in November 1989,
3. *Reaffirming* the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and its principles and recalling the Agenda 21 in which SIDS were recognized as a special case both for environment and development,
4. *Reaffirming* that SIDS are inherently and uniquely vulnerable to exogenous shocks owing to, inter alia, their small size, geographical remoteness, highly dispersed populations, the limited scale and undiversified nature of their economies, high dependence on external markets, and extreme exposure to disasters and natural hazards, and the effects of climate change—which create serious challenges to our sustainable development and ability to cope with environmental stressors,
5. *Recognising* that these physical and economic characteristics, give rise to distinct legal implications under international law, including differentiated responsibilities, flexibilities considering capacity constraints and tailored obligations in multilateral governance frameworks, and that these characteristics and legal implications collectively constitute the Special Circumstances of SIDS,
6. *Noting* that the phrase “special circumstances of small island developing states” has been used in legal instruments, such as the Paris Agreement, adopted under the UNFCCC; Minamata Convention on Mercury Agreement; the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), and the WHO

Pandemic Agreement; as well as multiple UN General Assembly resolutions, and that such recognition must be interpreted as a principle of international law,

7. *Noting* that both the Special Circumstances of SIDS in environmental agreements and the special case for SIDS in sustainable development documents result from the recognition of our unique and particular vulnerabilities,
8. *Recognising* that SIDS, despite our constrained human, technical, and financial capacities, are stewards of vast ocean territories and some of the most biodiverse and ecologically significant ecosystems in the world, and that implementation of international obligations must not impose a disproportionate burden on us,
9. *Recalling* that SIDS have provided longstanding leadership in environment and development issues, have shown an unwavering commitment to international law through the early ratification of agreements and fulfilment of obligations, and have long demonstrated resilience and continued sustainable development despite challenges associated with our unique characteristics,
10. *Concerned* that, despite consistent reference to the special circumstances of SIDS, the recognition and practical operationalization of these special circumstances are inconsistent and underdeveloped across multilateral processes, particularly those addressing climate change, biodiversity, oceans, chemicals, and pollution—problems to which we contribute negligibly,
11. *Seriously concerned* that the recognition and operationalization of special circumstances face efforts to dilute, omit and oppose the upholding of the principle, limiting the ability of SIDS to fully exercise their leadership, knowledge and innovation in response to environmental and developmental issues,
12. *Underscoring* that effective and equitable global governance depends upon fair consideration of differential capacities and vulnerabilities, and that recognizing and operationalizing the SCSIDS is essential to both effectiveness and equity.

**WE, THE HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT OF THE ALLIANCE OF SMALL ISLAND STATES,
THEREFORE:**

1. Declare that the recognition of Special Circumstances of Small Island Developing States constitute a principle of international law, and must be fully operationalized,
2. Assert that the Special Circumstances of SIDS should be used as a guiding principle for the implementation of international obligations,
3. Affirm that as a result of the principle of Special Circumstances of SIDS, SIDS are entitled to particular consideration, including but not limited to:

- a. Access to simplified procedures, tailored eligibility criteria and dedicated non-debt creating financing for SIDS;
 - b. Procedures that ensure meaningful participation and consent in decisions that have transboundary effects on or affect our marine and terrestrial environments;
 - c. Tailored obligations that recognize constrained human, technical, and institutional capacities without diminishing our sovereignty; and
 - d. Measures that address disproportionate exposure to environmental harm, economic shocks and cumulative ecological risk,
4. Recognize that the principle of the Special Circumstances of SIDS is rooted in or related to broader legal doctrines, including the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC), equity, sovereign equality of states, and the duty to cooperate under international law,
5. Call upon all States, international organizations, and treaty bodies and related institutional and financial mechanisms to explicitly reference and implement the Special Circumstances of SIDS in the design, interpretation, and implementation of all multilateral agreements, including those under negotiation or review,
6. Invite treaty secretariats, technical bodies, international financial institutions and multilateral funds to institutionalize the Special Circumstances of SIDS through dedicated procedures, reporting formats, eligibility criteria, and expert groups that reflect the realities of SIDS,
7. Commit to advancing the recognition of the Special Circumstances of SIDS and its operationalization in all fora where SIDS are engaged, including those under or relating to the United Nations, the UNFCCC, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the BBNJ Agreement, the forthcoming plastic pollution instrument, and other forthcoming international instruments and frameworks,
8. Declare that the failure to recognize and implement the Special Circumstances of SIDS undermines the principle of equity, and threatens the effective participation and sovereign equality of SIDS in global governance, and
9. Call upon all the international community to support this Declaration through their practice and their commitments, consistent with the duty to cooperate and to ensure a just, inclusive, and sustainable future.

AGREED at New York, 25 September 2025