



**Statement on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) under
ITEM 19: Sustainable development (a)-(i)**

13 October 2020

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), and we align ourselves with the statement delivered by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 & China.

Let me begin by thanking the Secretary-General for the reports presented under this cluster, which provide useful information to guide our work.

Mr Chair,

Although we began 2020 ready to usher in the Decade of Action, we were met instead with a global crisis of unprecedented scale. The COVID-19 pandemic has imperiled progress across the world, stalling growth and ultimately halting the work towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our lack of preparedness as a global community of nations has exposed the variation in our development and the seemingly insurmountable challenges that confront many of us. The most vulnerable countries have face tremendous obstacles in this crisis, with inadequate health systems and limited fiscal space. How does that

common saying go, we are all in the same storm, but in different boats? Undoubtedly some of us are in a leaky dorey.

The real challenges only begin to emerge when we layer this crisis against the backdrop of the lack of sufficient implementation of the development agendas. The High-Level Mid-term Review of the SAMOA Pathway revealed that the implementation of the goals and targets have been varied, with several areas not recording sufficient progress. And that's only where we could measure implementation. The Review also noted that there were enough gaps in the accounting that should give one pause. It is in this context that we called upon the Secretary-General and all relevant UN entities to develop targets and indicators for priority areas of the SAMOA Pathway that are not covered by existing instruments. We look forward to the recommendations which will be presented next session, which will hopefully enable us to evaluate and address these persistent challenges.

This is more critical now, as these existing challenges have now been further exacerbated by the crisis, placing us in a more precarious position than before. The monolithic SIDS economies are overtly susceptible to periods of crisis and exogenous shocks. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are clear in this regard. By closing our borders, we ultimately closed down our industries. The halt of tourism has had widespread repercussions in our economies, affecting income and growth. Our countries are poised to see contractions of up to twenty percent in some instances. With no clear timeline for complete reopening, it is a dire situation that will persist. The same is true of SIDS economies that are resource-based. The pandemic's effects on trade are undoubtedly negative. The deterioration of revenues and reduced remittances have also increased concerns about food security in many SIDS.

A third layer is required. The precarious debt position of SIDS is no secret. Although varied, the average debt to GDP in SIDS was 61 percent in 2019. That is double any other developing country grouping. This unsustainable position was before SIDS had to weather the pandemic and disasters during this year's cyclone and hurricane season. This has escalated sovereign debt distress in many countries, further setting back the prospects of economic growth and sustainable development.

Since the onset of the crisis, SIDS have been calling for a *targeted* approach to addressing these issues, complimented by the *required systemic reforms* that would enable us to pursue a sustainable recovery. SIDS solutions for SIDS challenges. In this regard, we hope to urgently operationalize the "SIDS Compact" that creates a special funding window for SIDS, enables better access to concessional financing through utilizing a multi-dimensional vulnerability index, and drives a collective and sustainable response for addressing sovereign debt distress in the long-term.

Mr Chair,

In addition to the COVID-19 crisis, SIDS are also at the forefront of the climate crisis. A fourth layer, if you will. While we are grappling with response and recovery from the pandemic, our countries continue to face the escalating impacts of climate change, as illustrated by Tropical Cyclone Harold that hit the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, and Tonga during the peak of the pandemic, or Hurricane Nana in Belize that pressed the already limited fiscal space of the country. Many of us have reached our limits of adaptation within the finite resources at our disposal, and are already suffering loss and damage. The latest science has reaffirmed the urgency of our call for enhanced, urgent and collective actions to reach carbon neutrality by

2050, and avoid the catastrophe that would unfold in a world with warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

As a starting point, we need to see these commitments materializing in the form of new and revised NDCs by the end of 2020, as well as long-term Greenhouse Gas reduction strategies. These should be aligned with the response and recovery measures, to ensure that we are not just building back better, but building forward better. In addition to this, we need to ensure adequate public finance for both mitigation and adaptation, with the realization of the \$100 billion goal this year as the point of departure. We also need to determine a new collective goal that is commensurate with the rapidly evolving needs of countries, especially the ones at the highest risk.

These intersecting and layered crises have also revealed the urgent need to enhance the capacity of SIDS to prepare and respond to disasters. Despite our firm commitment and best efforts, SIDS continue to suffer disproportionately higher losses due to our specific vulnerabilities and challenges. We reiterate our call for the examination of the disaster-related funding and support environment for SIDS, with a view to the possible development of a targeted mechanism or financial instrument, and look forward to the findings which will be presented next year. At the same time, capacity should also be enhanced in collection of data and monitoring, as only 8% of SIDS are currently utilizing the Sendai monitoring Framework.

Our discussions over the last few months have revealed that there are numerous avenues for pursuing sustainable recovery, which will advance the mutually reinforcing SDGs. Therefore, in determining economic recovery measures and

formulating stimulus packages, it is important to be strategic, in order to maximize co-benefits and long-term returns.

In this regard, “energy decarbonization with universal access” has been identified in the Secretary-General’s Report as one of the entry points with the most promise for achieving transformations at the necessary scale and speed. Also, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) estimates that renewables-based energy transition brings at least three times more jobs than fossil fuels, with every \$1 million invested creating 25 new jobs. The pandemic has also demonstrated how critical energy security is in provision of essential services, and how responses can be more cost effective with renewables.

SIDS have already illustrated our dedication to transitioning to renewable energy at the Climate Action Summit last year, where we committed to achieve our energy transition targets by 2030. While the pandemic has resulted in global diversion of critical funding and resources to address the most imminent crisis at hand, we recognize that this is an important turning point to transform our economies, and transition away from our detrimental reliance on fossil fuels. Through the SIDS Lighthouse Initiative, IRENA has been supporting SIDS in energy transition, and achieving the targets of the Paris Agreement, 2030 Agenda and SAMOA Pathway, while recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Placing renewable energy at the core of green recovery plans can signal a long-term public commitment to the industry, boosting investor confidence and attracting private capital. We call upon all Member States to support SIDS through investments to accelerate the transition to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy and achieving universal access by 2030.

It is also critical to ensure an environment responsive approach as we plan our response and recovery efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how our unsustainable practices can lead to the emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases, in addition to causing widespread and often permanent impacts on global biodiversity. Our focus must not be limited to protecting people, but also the planet, through fostering a more positive relationship between nature and people as we move forward.

We welcome the Leader's Pledge for Nature, which was endorsed by over 70 countries during the High-Level Segment of the General Assembly, and strongly encourage all countries to join this pledge to send a strong signal of commitment towards an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework at the 15th Biodiversity COP taking place next year.

It is our actions over the next few months that will determine the future progress of the SAMOA Pathway, 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement. It is our collective actions over the next few months that will determine the survival of SIDS. We hope that the work of the Committee under this cluster of items will give pave the way towards a sustainable and equitable recovery leaving no one behind, while generating further momentum to advance the Decade of Action.

I thank you.