



ALLIANCE OF SMALL ISLAND STATES

AOSIS Statement ECOSOC Special Meeting on Small Island Developing States 23rd April 2021

President of ECOSOC,
President of the General Assembly
Excellencies,

3 million lives lost and almost 145 million infected to date.

Over the past 16 months, what started as a seemingly isolated health concern, far removed from many of our shores, has morphed into a life-altering global pandemic.

COVID-19 is much more than a public health crisis. It has shaken the very foundations of our multilateral system, sparking an abrupt and severe global recession and now threatening economic contagion.

While no country is spared, the effects of the pandemic have hit small island developing states disproportionately.

Instantaneously, global economic activity was decimated and for some SIDS an almost complete halt in economic activity, with still no end in sight.

This pandemic's socioeconomic consequences are likely to be felt for years to come. It will unravel decades of development progress and derail global prospects for achieving the SDGs, and the goals of the Paris Agreement and SAMOA Pathway.

Mr. President,

There is an acceptance by all that SIDS have special circumstances and are uniquely vulnerable. Our small size and small economies make us inherently susceptible to external economic and financial shocks. Our geographies mean that climate change threatens our very survival.

It is also a fact, that at any one point, a disaster can change the face of our small states, eliminating decades of developmental gains and at the extreme, render us landless.

Thirty years ago, in Rio, the international community recognized SIDS as a special case for sustainable development and acknowledged that we are the most vulnerable group of countries.



But thirty years late, small islands still do not have the necessary financial instruments, tools and development assistance in order to address the severity and multiplicity of crises we face.

As we struggle to contain the virus and address the economic fallout, our governments must provide the social safety nets that our poorest and most vulnerable desperately need--saving lives and safeguarding livelihoods within our extremely limited fiscal space.

For many of our islands, the designation as middle and high-income countries prohibit us from accessing the relevant international relief mechanisms to address the crisis.

Relief that is needed to prevent a lost decade of development and help to usher our citizens out of poverty.

Mr. President,

Our ask is simple, and our appeal is the same year after year. The rules that govern development assistance must be revised.

The majority of our countries are unable to access concessional financing, debt relief or debt forgiveness, even when struggling to recover from the impacts of the strongest hurricanes the world has ever seen.

While we welcome the G20's extension of the DSSI, without its expansion to include highly indebted middle-income countries, the DSSI in its current form is still not applicable to many of us.

What is required are tailored solutions for SIDS. This includes not only the enhancement of existing financial instruments, but also the design of effective new instruments to provide debt relief including through cancellation, suspensions, rescheduling and restructuring, as well as other support measures.

Excellencies,

In 1994, the Barbados Program of Action mandated work on the development of vulnerability indices and other indicators that reflect the status of small island developing States.

In 1996 the Commission on Sustainable Development reiterated this mandate and again noted that the relevant bodies of the United Nations System should give priority to the development of an index for small island developing states.

In 2001 and 2002, the Secretary-General presented reports on the limited efforts that had been taken by several United Nations organizations and intergovernmental bodies in developing SIDS vulnerability.

And last year the General Assembly mandated a further study on the need for a multi-dimensional vulnerability index for small island developing states and recommendations to be provided to the Secretary-General.



Over the span of 27 years, the evidence is clear that SIDS are more vulnerable than income data alone might suggest.

We face severe structural challenges due to our remoteness, economic concentration, and dependence on external flows such as remittances, foreign direct investment, and tourism revenues.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly exacerbated these vulnerabilities by restricting travel, collapsing investment and tourism, and weakening the economies from which remittances are sent.

Without swift action, international support and a rethink of the development framework, SIDS will continue to be victim to a wave of COVID-induced financial challenges and any future crises.

Therefore, the international financial institutions and governance structures must consider eligibility for concessional financing to SIDS, based on vulnerability rather than just income criteria.

Bold actions that will finally break the failed policy prescriptions offered to us should no longer be delayed.

Immediately, measures should be put in place that will allow SIDS to build back better and become resilient against future shocks.

An assessment of measurement and the utilization of a multi-dimensional vulnerability index that looks beyond the income criteria is at the heart of what is needed for long-term macroeconomic stability, debt management and systemic resilience.

Mr. President,

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased our sense of the smallness of our international community. We recognize that vulnerabilities in one part of our community affect the whole. We know, from 75 years of experience, that tackling global problems requires solidarity and cooperation.

The multitude of crises we face are interlinked and all must be confronted if we are to truly achieve sustainable development.

This means that even though we remain in the throes of the pandemic and the worsening economic crisis, we cannot forget or delay action on climate change and expect strong ambition at COP 26 in Glasgow.

The Group welcomes the announcements from several major emitters and financial institutions at the United States' Leader's Summit on Climate on their much-improved 2030 climate targets and commitment toward increased climate financing. These, however, are not yet enough to give our islands a fighting chance for a 1.5oC world that we collectively agreed to in the Paris Agreement.

While they are important steps, we encourage all countries to continue to ratchet up their ambition – on action and support – before COP26 in Glasgow.



As a society, we have always been confident in our ability to develop remedies that resolve the problems we create.

The international community has swiftly developed vaccines to combat the coronavirus, it is therefore a matter of global-interest, and a humanitarian and moral imperative, for every country to have access to COVID-19 vaccines.

COVID-19 vaccines should be allocated fairly and equitably and treated as global public goods, not marketable commodities.

Therefore, the pricing of vaccines should take into account the economic challenges faced by SIDS and the humanitarian needs of our small states.

Protectionist health policies anywhere will only continue to pose a threat everywhere and will counter any global efforts in ending the virus.

Additionally, while we are acutely conscious of the need to continue to protect our respective citizenry, SIDS are burdened with enormous economic decline from the reduction in travel.

We therefore encourage Governments to move with some urgency, to facilitate the resumption of safe cross-border travel, which will help to revive our struggling economies.

In Closing, traumatic global events have the potential to engender positive turning points in the international community, we have seen this over and over again.

let us use this opportunity to ensure that small island developing states and other developing countries are able to build back better and be more resilient to future shocks.

Mr. President I wish for us to reflect at this moment on the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines who are facing the reality that they might have to leave their beloved island behind for many years because of the ongoing volcanic eruption.

And as we reflect, let us ensure that the entire UN development system is able to offer the relevant support that they so urgently require.

I Thank You.

