

**Statement by the Republic of Estonia to the Plenary of the Third International Conference
on Small Island Developing States**

Delivered by Mr Väino Reinart, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia

Tuesday, 2 September 2014, Apia, Independent State of Samoa

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Honorable President of the Conference,

It is a great privilege and pleasure for me to be with you in Apia, thank you for this opportunity to address the Conference. I would like to thank the Prime Minister of Samoa and his country for hosting the Conference and for the excellent preparations.

Estonia and small island states regions are geographically distant but we share common values and concerns. Estonia's population is only 1,3 million, but our coastline is over 3000 km (5 times longer than the land border), and we have 1500 islands. The maritime environment directly affects our economy and well-being. We, like small island states, know that the sea is a valuable resource that needs our close attention and protection. This year, the issues of sea are especially on our minds as Estonia is chairing the Council of the Baltic Sea, the sea surrounding Estonia and eight other countries.

As small nations, we certainly have limited resources. But we should not focus on disadvantages. We must channel our efforts to come up with ideas and practices how to make the best out of our size. For example, we can use our flexibility in developing and implementing new and smart technologies in order to promote the growth. Estonia has been successfully building up its e-society for two decades now. These solutions have improved the efficiency of state functions, facilitated a shift towards an attractive business environment, and simplified the everyday life of ordinary citizen.

As small nations, we are strong proponents of safeguarding International Law and the fulfillment of international obligations. The annexation of Crimea, a part of sovereign Ukraine, is a recent, alarming example how International Law was violated. We cannot accept overriding

international treaties anywhere in the world, because this is a direct threat to our security and well-being. Similarly, the obligations by the international community to fulfill the targets of tackling climate change must be taken most seriously. Protecting International Law and achieving the mitigation of climate change are prerequisites for sustainable development.

We understand the challenges that small island states are facing and are willing to support finding solutions as a partner and share our experience. As today's world has become more interdependent, problems that once seemed distant and insignificant, affect us all. We need to be aware of other regions' concerns, including the environment and security. Thus, solidarity, international cooperation, a true dialogue, and the open exchange of information and views are absolutely necessary.

I am glad that the International Year of Small Island Developing States has greatly raised awareness of global issues that affect small island states the most. This Conference is the culmination of a remarkable year and a step forward in identifying the unique needs and vulnerabilities of island nations and opportunities for international support. The problems being discussed during the Conference have not evolved locally and are not merely regional, but global. However, actions need to be taken at the state level. Therefore, it is important that the international community is represented at the Conference and committed to act. The aspect of implementation also needs to be taken into consideration when defining the Sustainable Development Goals after 2015.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of the Conference is sustainable development through partnerships. I totally agree that small island states' concerns could only be effectively addressed if the governments, private sector and civil society come together and unite their ideas, knowledge and means. Estonia contributed to small island states Conference Trust Fund and we are committed to make a long-term contribution to a partnership on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

As we all know, one of the biggest challenges with dramatic impact on living conditions, security and the survival of small island states, is climate change. It is a matter of the utmost importance that an ambitious, single, global, legally binding agreement, applicable to all, will be concluded next year. We will work closely together with our small island states partners for successful negotiations and outcomes in New York, Lima and Paris.

When talking about the effects of climate change and global warming, we must consider oceans, seas and economic development. Small island states are the most vulnerable nations to the rise of sea level, acidification of the ocean, decrease of fish stocks and scarcity of freshwater. For small island states, oceans and their vast resources are the basis on which economic growth and jobs depend and form the entire living environment. Maritime transport connections and fuel supplies remain essential for small island states for accessing international markets, imports of goods, and for tourism. Until now, a lot of attention has been paid to alternative solutions in the mainland but the ocean and sea dimension has been largely neglected. Hopefully, the issues of blue economy and blue development will be addressed more in the future as I was pleased to see the theme of this year's Pacific Islands Forum.

Continuing on connections and sustainable development, advancements in the ICT sector are crucial for connecting people, supporting trade, facilitating investments, competing in new markets, and improving access to information. Creating ICT infrastructure in small island states is difficult but has been improving over years; this is where the private sector could contribute with expanding operations through affordable ICT rates and innovation to increase internet access. In the situation of limited resources and a remote or dispersed population, introducing and developing e- and mobile- services is also indispensable. I mentioned earlier that we have built an e-society in Estonia. This includes e-services and solutions both in the private and public sector that enable internet banking, digital signatures, electronic tax filing, electronic voting, e-business registry, digital prescriptions and more. Estonia is a vivid example of how ICT can simplify life and enhance development in a small nation. We have worked with many countries that wish to introduce e-solutions similar to those in Estonia and we are ready to share our experience with small island states.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The distance between Estonia and SIDS regions is only geographical. Allow me to emphasize that the values and goals we share, bring us together and urge us to find the solutions for common challenges. I am sure that our discussions at this Conference will help us bring our relations even closer.

Thank you!