

**Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Guyana,  
Honorable Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett at the Third International  
Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS)  
APIA, SAMOA**

**September 1-4, 2014**

**Mr Chairman**

Heads of State and Government

Heads of Delegation

Ladies and Gentlemen

**Mr Chairman, we are meeting today at this the** Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States **and** twenty years after the adoption of the 1994 Barbados Program of Action (BPOA) where many commitments to support the sustainable development of SIDS were made. We are also meeting today 14 years after the Millennium Development Goals were announced and cognizant that the international community is about to transition from the Millennium Development Goals to an ambitious, and hopefully, transformative post 2015 development agenda. The question, Mr Chairman, that one might ask, is how much have we achieved since those enthusiastic and hopeful days of 1994 and secondly how optimistic must we be given the circumstances of today. No doubt the answers are mixed depending on who is answering them.

However, what remains true, relevant and even more urgent, Mr Chairman, is that the peculiar situation of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), must be

recognized and urgent action taken to ensure the survival and sustainability of these countries.

The call has been made at numerous fora for urgent support for the SIDS from the international community. In diverse meetings on sustainable development and climate since 1994, financial and technological support has been pledged for vulnerable countries, particularly SIDS. But while there has been a response, it can hardly be considered adequate and for the most part the pledges have remained just that - pledges. Indeed, the response has been disproportionate to the increasing threats SIDS are facing.

Mr Chairman, even as we move to the determination of the Sustainable Development Goals and reflect on the achievements, or lack thereof, of the MDGs, I humbly submit that the MDG that placed some responsibility on the developed world to the developing world and has probably had the least success is - MDG 8 a global partnership for development. Indeed the 0.7% of GNI pledged by the developed world to assist developing countries has only been met by a few countries. Mr Chairman, this situation must be recognised and corrected soonest.

But Mr Chairman, I did not come all this way to only point out the difficulties we face and disappointments we have experienced. We are all aware that the challenges facing small island states have multiplied and we must out of necessity find new and innovative approaches to address those challenges, and ensure that SIDS's have a fair chance of participating in and benefiting from a dynamic post 2015 development agenda. In this regard, the theme for this

*Conference "The Sustainable Development of Small Island States through*

*Genuine and Durable Partnerships"* is particularly relevant. SIDS cannot solve the issues affecting them alone. We need real and durable partnerships. In this regard, I want to point to a few areas where such partnerships are urgently needed. Since many of our international partners are here, I am very hopeful that our voices will be heard and sympathy for our situation will be translated into real action in the new international order we are now embarking upon.

1. The first issue is that of Graduation/Differentiation. This is the first graduation that no SIDS want to celebrate since it has serious implications for the reduction of concessionary financing among other things, which ironically is what helped most of our countries to achieve some of the Millenium development goals and rebuild infrastructure damaged by natural disasters. For Guyana, which only a few short years ago became eligible for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), the gains made can easily be reversed if graduation occurs. The point must be made that the GDP metric being used currently is highly inappropriate and the vulnerability index must added. Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, the cascading effects of graduation are real. As I was leaving Guyana for Samoa the Minister of Health told me that he was informed that Guyana will now have to pay an increased cost for vital drugs and vaccines because we have "graduated". At a time when our region is grappling with the increase in NCDS this can only set us back. We are therefore asking the world decision makers to reconsider this issue of graduation and adjust the metric to cater for the



special case of SIDS. We are ready and willing to work with you in this regard.

2. The second issue is that of high levels of debt. Mr Chairman, we cannot begin to speak of sustainable development if the issue of high levels of debt is not addressed. For the Caribbean this is a major issue. To be clear, this is not because of bad governance. It has to do with the unique features of SIDS and the fact that many of them are constantly borrowing to rebuild after natural disasters. Repayment is hindered by the onslaught of disasters and expenditure on proactive adaptation measures. Relief from debt is one measure that can be used to assist SIDS in their effort to develop in an increasingly challenging international environment. Again we call on our international partners to work with those SIDS countries that are heavily indebted.

3. Financing for Development - Mr. Chairman, as we prepare for the Meeting on Financing for Development these issues must be addressed and new and innovative approaches found to address the many issues of SIDS. As has been said before setting the SDGs is probably the easier part of the equation, how we finance the implementation of the SDGs is what will be the challenge. We expect that real partnerships will be the hallmark of the upcoming Meeting on Financing for Development.

Chair, no debate on the economic, social and environmental aspects of SIDS development can be complete without acknowledging the immense impact that climate change is having on these countries, and indeed, on all of our countries. These impacts unfortunately, have only adverse effects on our

development. SIDS are faced with an onslaught of weather-related disasters such as floods and droughts, rising sea levels with all the accompanying hazards to our food security and threats to the trade balance of commodity producing countries, among other things.

The Fifth Assessment Report of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has confirmed that climate change is man-made, and that unless urgent action is taken, climate-induced disasters will only intensify, with disastrous consequences. Sea level is expected to rise more quickly than previously forecasted, based on current trends in greenhouse gas emissions. The Fifth Assessment report also documents the likelihood of the threat posed by the 3.8 degree rise in global temperature that has been pledged by our partners from the developed countries. The failure of these countries to commit to the less than 2 degree target agreed in Copenhagen, and its resultant impact on the lives of future generations of SIDS citizens is regrettable. Guyana joins in the call upon the developed countries to renew their efforts to increase targets in line with the scientific findings and to also provide adequate financial and technological support to help SIDS adapt to impacts caused by those very countries, to build preparedness against disasters, and to manage risk posed by the increasing threat of disasters. Low-lying coastal countries like Guyana where most of our population and agricultural lands are below sea level are more vulnerable and suffer even greater risk.

Chair, these are just a few issues which the Delegation of Guyana would wish to highlight. In the prevailing economic climate and a sluggish recovery from a recession that has had wide ranging economic impact on all our countries in

one way or the other, it is of paramount importance to bring a new cooperation dynamic to the table. Thus, South-South cooperation, North-South cooperation and triangular cooperation must become more prominent and pursued in a way that allows all to benefit. In this regard, the partnership dialogues will play a critical role in moving the SIDS agenda forward.

In closing Chair, allow me to congratulate the Government and people of the Independent State of Samoa on their warm hospitality and excellent arrangements in hosting the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States – a very important milestone in bringing the SIDS to the forefront of the international agenda.

I thank you.