

INTERVENTION BY

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AT THE UNITED NATIONS

**THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SMALL ISLAND
DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS)**

**1st – 4th SEPTEMBER 2014
APIA, INDEPENDENT STATE OF SAMOA**

**THEME: “THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND
DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS) THROUGH GENUINE AND DURABLE
PARTNERSHIPS”**

Please Check Against Delivery!

Mr. President,

First please allow me to congratulate you on your election as President of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States. I pledge to you my delegation's full cooperation and support. I would also like to thank the Government and People of the Independent State of Samoa for their warm welcome to this beautiful country.

Mr. President,

The new and old world met historically in The Bahamas at a place then called Guanahani and now named San Salvador. Christopher Columbus's first landfall in the new world, happened in The Bahamas and ushered in an unprecedented age of exploration, discovery, and development. This opening of the world to global communication and trade connected peoples across oceans and continents.

Mr. President,

Today, this assembly embodies the essence of such globalisation; and brings together a diverse representation of people – diverse, yet with

common challenges. Those challenges are predicated on our geography and demography as small island states. As nations, we celebrated this commonality at the UN Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of SIDS some twenty years ago.

The Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (BPoA) agreed in 1994 has served as the blue print for action on sustainable development that should be undertaken by SIDS with the cooperation and assistance of the international community.

The sustainable development priorities outlined therein and reaffirmed in the Mauritius Strategy for its further implementation and now the SAMOA Pathway, are rooted in the fact that SIDS remain a special case for sustainable development and continue to face unique and increasing challenges.

Mr. President:

The Bahamas is an ocean archipelagic state. We are comprised of an expanse of seven hundred (700) islands sprinkled over one hundred thousand (100,000) square miles or 13,940 km² of the world's most beautiful waters. For The Bahamas, the development of our infrastructure and human capital presents an economic challenge, because we have to replicate and duplicate services on many islands.

Where some SIDS only require one international airport, we have over 20. To maintain the health of our nation the Government maintains and operates over 100 health care facilities throughout the islands. The government's responsibility to provide equal access to public services demands a continual upgrade and expansion of infrastructure in our rural and remote communities.

Mr. President,

All of this for a population of just over three hundred thousand (300,000) people – the majority of whom reside on two islands. As you

may imagine, this is an awesome task that requires great amount of funding.

Fortunately, we have been blessed with the natural beauty and geography that enable us to use tourism as the primary development tool to provide the capital for these services.

Mr. President,

Tourism represents the most important economic engine for The Bahamas. Last year, over 6.1 million visitors spent more than US\$2 billion. Some 60% of our nation's GDP is derived from tourism, which employs more than 50% of our workforce.

Recognising the important role that tourism plays, in the economic development of SIDS, the Bahamas in collaboration with the UNWTO has hosted two SIDS tourism regional conferences, in 2006 and most recently in February 2014. The outcome of the February 2014 conference is an important part of the Samoa Pathway.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas is a microcosm of the Caribbean in terms of its many islands and diverse beauty and offerings. Our natural features provide unequalled opportunities to develop ecotourism to its fullest. We are, therefore, very careful to protect our environment and to stay engaged in national, regional and international measures to curtail climate change and coastal erosion.

As we expand ecotourism, we give credence to the recent UN General Assembly landmark Resolution recognising ecotourism as a tool for the promotion of sustainable development, providing "a positive impact on income generation, job creation and education, and thus on the fight against poverty and hunger."

Notwithstanding the current challenging economic times, we have to be resolute and creative in finding workable solutions, including public private partnerships, providing for efficient and affordable airlift into as many markets as possible.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas stands today to be heard, to bring attention to our plight, to bring about action now to sustain our business, and to secure a brighter future. We are one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change and its impacts. In fact, a World Bank report indicates that The Bahamas is one of the island states most vulnerable to sea level rise as approximately 80% of our landmass is within 1.5 meters of sea level. Climate Change is not simply about changing our way of life, it is primarily about saving lives!

Hurricanes verily remind us of this fact. Along with our Caribbean neighbours, we are scattered in the Atlantic Ocean's hurricane belt. We can all identify with the catastrophic eventualities of storm winds, flood, and sea surges.

Our National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has operated well over the years, but again, our archipelagic nature makes it difficult and costly to assess damage from natural disasters across the country, and to provide timely assistance to citizens in lesser populated out flung islands. Funding for development or refurbishment of essential infrastructure to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change is a necessity and challenge. If we truly believe that the polluter pays, the developed world must partner with the Bahamas to enhance our resilience.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas is deliberately working to mitigate risk factors that may threaten our stability including through better land-use planning, and strengthening our Geographic Information Systems. This year we established the Bahamas National Geographic Information Systems Centre as a Department, which enables us to enhance or use of geo-spatial data in understanding and assessing the mitigation actions required to address the adverse risks of climate change.

Our Fisheries Act is in the process of being updated. The Bahamas is creating new Marine Protected Areas this year, expanding the network

system beyond 10% of our nearshore environment and protecting our marine resources. We also created the Bahamas Protected Area Fund in July 2014, to help to attract donors and develop international partnerships as part of the sustainable finance mechanism of the Caribbean Challenge Initiative.

Regarding food security, we have the same challenges as other SIDS. To meet this challenge we are establishing an autonomous body, the Bahamas Agriculture and Marine Science Institute. The Institute is expected to establish and operate a state-of-the-art comprehensive commercial teaching farm. We have partnered with Universities throughout the world in relation to the advancement of The Institute.

In pursuit of affordable and resilient housing for all, Mr. President we are using new construction systems that are more environmentally sustainable and incorporating energy efficient appliances and solar water heaters and photovoltaic solar systems.

We are engaging local communities to educate them on housing programmes and teaching them how to build resilience as recommended by the Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA).

Mr. President,

As The Bahamas continues to focus on adaptation to climate change, we have identified the National Policy for Adaptation to Climate Change; Civil Society Partnerships are critical to the integration of our national development plan and the dialogue is on-going.

The Bahamas notes, with keen interest, the operationalisation of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts. We welcome the commitment to address and strengthen dialogue, coordination, coherence and synergies among relevant stakeholders. Solidarity is the watchword here. Together, we must enhance action to secure support, including finance, technology and capacity-building, to address loss and damage to our territories and ways of life.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas is wholly dependent on imported fossil fuel for the generation of electricity. In an effort to reduce this dependency and our carbon footprint, the Bahamas has adopted a National Energy Policy which includes the introduction of renewable energy goals of at least 30% of energy generation by way of renewable technologies by 2030. To assist in this effort The Bahamas has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Clinton Foundation, will become a signatory to SIDS DOCK and is negotiating inclusion in the Carbon War Room Ten Island Challenge. The Bahamas has also joined IRENA and welcomes the SIDS Lighthouse Initiative.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas manages to meet its national and international financial obligations, not without a struggle. This is exacerbated by external shocks to the financial sector, our second largest industry.

We co-exist in a world where assistance is predicated on the basis of per capita income as the sole indicator of need. Our per capita income is distorted and does not properly reflect the economic realities of our citizens and remote island communities, where poverty is the rule and not the exception.

Mr. President,

More than twelve percent (12.8%) of our population is living below the poverty line. We struggle with communicating to the international community our uniqueness and the challenges of developing, sustainably, as an archipelagic nation where climate change threatens our very existence.

Mr. President,

Our limited resources are further burdened by the challenge of irregular and undocumented migration. Too great an amount of our financial resources are redirected as a result of our repatriation efforts which is exacerbated due our proximity to North America.

Mr. President,

I have sought to give you an overview of the Bahamian reality. This reality cannot be properly conveyed though, until one has seen it and lived it.

We have been a part of AOSIS for the more than twenty years of its existence. For the twenty years, we have shared visions, ideals, and challenges. For twenty years, we have set forth our needs. And for twenty years, we have been denied funding because of our per capita income.

Mr. President,

The UN system could stand to enhance its support to SIDS like The Bahamas, strengthening its institutions where necessary and providing more focused and additional services to SIDS.

In this regard, we echo the call for the establishment of a robust global follow-up system that would strengthen accountability at all levels and effective monitoring and analysis of the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway.

The Bahamas would also call for a coherent international agenda – a post 2015 development agenda that recognises the special needs of SIDS, as well as Climate Change, Disaster Risk Reduction, and Human Settlement Agendas that build on the SAMOA Pathway.

Mr. President,

For over twenty years, we have fought soberly to bring positive change to our plight. We have not been heard, yet we are expected to respond effectively to hurdles imposed, not only by climate change, but by cross-cutting challenges that befall every dimension of development. Mr. Secretary General, by your admonishment, our voices will be heard. We will speak with one loud and collective voice at your upcoming summit. The Bahamas will be there.

Appreciating the urgency of now, we hope the developed world will listen and respond by taking immediate action!

Mr. President,
The Bahamas thanks you.