

Statement by  
H.E. Ambassador Dr. John W. Ashe  
President-elect of the United Nations General Assembly  
at its 68<sup>th</sup> Session  
to the Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Third  
International Conference on Small Island Developing States

Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013, Fiji

*Check against delivery.*

Honourable Prime Minister,  
Madam Chairperson of AOSIS,  
Excellencies,  
Colleagues,  
Under-Secretary-General and Secretary-General of the Conference Wu,  
Deputy Executive Secretary of UNESCAP,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

BULA!

I am pleased to be able to join you at the second preparatory meeting for the 2014 Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Conference. With over 300 islands and nearly twice as many islets, our host nation of Fiji knows both the challenges and the opportunities related to SIDS.

Over the years, the concerns of SIDS have long been central in my interactions at various international fora, UN conferences and events. My commitment to SIDS concerns has not and will not change.

This September, I will assume the office of President of the General Assembly (PGA) of the 68<sup>th</sup> session. And I am particularly heartened by the fact that 2014 Conference will be held under my watch. Today I stand here before you to pledge my full support for the preparatory processes leading up to and for the 2014 SIDS Conference itself, given that the concerns it will address have a particular and unique resonance and meaning for me. And like each of you here today, I, too, am committed to its success.

During the course of the year, my PGA team and I will be actively working with you on ensuring meaningful outcomes in 2014.

Excellences,  
Colleagues,

Today, you the participants are about to take a very important step in a process leading up to the conference in Samoa.

As your Caribbean SIDS colleagues have done last week in Jamaica, and as your AMES SIDS colleagues will do next week in the Seychelles, you the PSIDS are about to define your outcomes for the next year's conference in Samoa.

It is an exercise that should not be taken lightly, in view of the fact that the conference presents an opportunity to define SIDS' developmental priorities for the next twenty years and to map out a more sustainable future for SIDS.

It is a chance to assess your successes, and determine the what, when and how to address those issues where progress has been slow; it should also provide a platform for addressing new and emerging challenges that SIDS will face going forward.

Distinguished Guests,

If it widely accepted that neither the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA), the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation (MSI) or the MDGs framework are sufficient on their own to achieve inclusive sustainable development that is needed for SIDS. The BPOA and MSI did not give the necessary attention to the social and economic pillars of sustainable development, whilst the MDGs did not pay adequate attention to the environment and economic pillar. All gave scant attention to the enabling environment and the need for strategies and strong means of implementation.

Against this backdrop, permit me then to identify some challenges.

You will recall that the underlying General Assembly resolution calling for the 2014 Conference envisages an outcome document that, and I quote, "...will be a concise, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented political statement to address the sustainable development challenges facing SIDS." End quote.

Herein lies your first challenge: providing outputs from this preparatory process that will ensure that the conference outcome document is indeed all of the above.

Colleagues,

Another fundamental challenge is the need to ensure that these preparatory meetings are an important part of the overall collective process, and that their outcomes will ensure that regional issues are adequately reflected in the final conference outcome document.

I, for one, have no doubt that you will dedicate significant time to issues related to sustainable management of your largest asset – the mighty ocean that surrounds us. No

doubt you will also consider the role of social protection and ways to be more prepared when nature strikes.

Recent events in this region of the world, namely droughts, floods and tropical cyclones, all serve to underscore the urgency of the challenges facing SIDS.

Yet, while natural disasters are a major concern for SIDS countries, they are only one of many. Indeed people around the globe have struggled with food insecurity, rising fuel prices, instability in global financial markets, and unemployment, to name a few. But as we all know, these problems are more magnified and amplified for SIDS because of your unique socio-economic and environmental factors. SIDS have been particularly hard hit with increases in levels of debt, rising costs of energy and basic food staples. Economic progress has now come to a standstill and the pace of development has slowed.

At the same time, traditional models of economic growth and global governance are no longer sufficient or appropriate to address the magnitude of the challenges SIDS face.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The special vulnerabilities of SIDS countries were first identified at the first Rio Conference in 1992 and yet more than twenty years later, we find that in many ways, SIDS are more vulnerable now than ever. The geophysical and socio-economic challenges are still very much present. In some cases, they have intensified. And the extreme weather-related events envisioned by the negotiators of the climate change convention (UNFCCC) in 1992, are now a disturbing reality.

As I noted before, the internationally agreed outcomes from the first and second SIDS Conferences- the BPOA and MSI - set us in the right direction but did not take us far enough.

This is why you are gathering once again – to provide a forward-looking, action oriented document that will lead to significant attention for SIDS countries in both the High Level Political Forum and in the emerging post 2015 Development Agenda.

Ultimately, there will be numerous areas for consideration in the final outcome, but I would like to mention a few needs:

- Strong and effective partnerships – based on mutual trust - to build resilience and to support national development priorities. This includes South-South and Triangular cooperation, partnerships within SIDS countries, as well as partnerships with traditional donors.
- Strengthened efforts toward disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, as well as robust vulnerability analysis, inclusive of all its dimensions - economic, environmental and social.

- Strong social policies that include social safety nets and universal access to primary health care services to ensure protection for the most vulnerable.
- Decent employment and green jobs to spur economic growth while considering the well-being of workers.
- Knowledge-based economies with better information, research and use of technology, and the need for appropriate support to build these economies.
- Social capital at the community level and greater capacity at the community and household levels.
- Maximizing benefits of the tourism industry, while better understanding its carrying capacity and, finally,
- Practical solutions to the challenges of sustainable energy, food and water security.

Some SIDS have already made impressive progress in many of these areas. Certainly you can continue to build on this and learn from one another.

Excellences,  
Colleagues,

The timing of the SIDS Conference coincides with one of the biggest UN initiatives of recent decades –defining and launching a post-2015 Development Agenda.

The goal for SIDS is clear: to ensure special consideration in that agenda. It is not a question of preference, but of survival.

As President of the General Assembly, I have decided to focus on *setting the stage for the post-2015 Development Agenda* as my theme for the 68<sup>th</sup> session.

Within this overarching theme, I have selected six specific topics for deeper investigation:

- the role of women, youth and civil society;
- human rights and the rule of law;
- South-South, Triangular cooperation and ICT for development;
- the role of partnerships;
- ensuring stable and peaceful societies; and
- water, sanitation and sustainable energy

These topics will be explored in a series of both high-level events and thematic debates that will be held throughout the 68<sup>th</sup> session.

I look forward to – and call for - your active and substantive engagement. Let's use these opportunities to work together and create the results you want to see, both in Samoa and in the post 2015 Development Agenda.

Honourable Prime Minister,  
Colleagues,

The list of needs is long and the obstacles do look formidable.

Yet, as the saying goes, there is strength in numbers.

It's encouraging that as you gather here to harness political commitment for the future of SIDS, others elsewhere are focusing on a Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Indeed many are committed to the same goal. And when your energy is combined and your will is focused, you can make great strides.

So please make your proposals bold and big. Draw inspiration from the moral imperative of what you are trying to accomplish.

Now is the time to act and to protect the future of SIDS – for the sake of your homes, your families and your communities.

I wish you well. I wish you success with your deliberations. And I look forward to ultimately receiving your outcomes in my capacity as President of the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly.

Let me conclude by echoing the previous speakers in thanking the Prime Minister and his government and the people of Fiji for their warm and generous hospitality. This is my second visit in less than a month and I hope to be back here in the near future.

Thank you.