



Remarks
By

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General Assembly

on behalf of

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General Assembly

The Vulnerability of Caribbean Small Island Developing States Revisited:
It's All About Size

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**Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,**

Allow me first to congratulate the leadership and commend the foresight of ECLAC and the Caribbean Member States for organizing this side event; and to thank you for extending an invitation to the President of the Sixty-eighth Session of the General Assembly. Given President Ashe's unexpected early departure to New York, with your indulgence, I shall deliver these remarks on his behalf.

The President has been asked to address the issue of **situating the particular vulnerabilities of the Caribbean in the post-2015 development agenda**. To do so, three core questions must be answered:

1. what are the particular vulnerabilities of the Caribbean;
2. why should these be integrated into the post-2015 development agenda; and
3. how do we integrate the priorities in the new agenda.

I will address each question in turn.

What makes Caribbean SIDS particularly vulnerable?

The esteemed panel will focus largely on the economic and to some extent, the environmental vulnerabilities of Caribbean SIDS so I will refrain from elaborating on those. These remarks will instead address the **region's social vulnerabilities**, in an effort to demonstrate how – altogether – they mutually reinforce each other, giving rise to the persistent challenges that these countries face. Just as it is recognized that the three pillars of sustainable development – economic, environmental and social – are interlinked, so too are the economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities of Caribbean SIDS.

The overarching concern of the post-2015 development agenda is poverty eradication. This is perhaps one of the greatest challenges to human development and any solution to this challenge must be people-centred in its approach. As such, **addressing the social development needs of Caribbean SIDS in an integrated manner will be key**.

Some noteworthy social development challenges for the Caribbean that are interlinked with many of the region's economic vulnerabilities include **income inequality, crime and violence, unemployment, migration, gender inequality** and **health**. I will dwell briefly on a few of these to illustrate their interconnectivity with the other dimensions of sustainable development in the Caribbean context.

For Caribbean SIDS, the **extremes of income inequality**, which exists within and across countries, is well-known. It contributes to skewed GDP calculations that mask the reality of the economic situation of Caribbean countries. As a result, most Caribbean SIDS are categorized as middle income and therefore ineligible for concessionary resources and assistance from other development partners and multilateral institutions.

Income inequality is also closely linked to **education and unemployment** in the Caribbean. Generally speaking, higher education levels lead to higher income levels and at the same time higher levels of educational attainment should result in lower unemployment rates. In the case of the Caribbean however, the region faces challenges with its rates of secondary and tertiary school enrolment. Although education expansion is a reality in the Caribbean, access remains a major concern because many find the costs at the secondary and tertiary levels prohibitive. This impacts the rates of unemployment, which for the Caribbean region are significantly high when compared to their Pacific and AIMS counter parts.

The recent economic downturn has also severely hampered the ability of governments and the private sector to spur adequate employment opportunities. Alongside this, the region has seen increased rates of **crime and violence**, and as well, **outward migration**. The emigration rates are particularly striking in the Caribbean. Many countries have lost more than 70 percent of their labour force to OECD countries. This counts the Caribbean, amongst the countries with the highest emigration rates in the world, particularly for highly skilled labor. While the Caribbean may benefit through remittances, the losses due to highly skilled labor migration far outweigh those remittances. The outflow of human capital leaves a **major** development gap.

Excellencies, these are but a few of the social challenges that agitate the economic and environmental vulnerabilities of Caribbean SIDS.

Why do these vulnerabilities matter to the international agenda?

The international community has made an **unequivocal commitment** to address the unique challenges of SIDS. That commitment was first made in Barbados, re-affirmed in Mauritius, renewed in Rio and is **the** basis of the S.A.M.O.A. Pathway.

Excellencies, the SIDS Agenda is the international agenda.

There is a unanimous acknowledgement from the international community that addressing the challenges SIDS face will provide a pathway for addressing those very challenges at the global scale in the long term.

The how?

Coming now to the topic at hand “situating the principal vulnerabilities of the Caribbean in the post-2015 agenda” –

The paradigmatic shift in development that is premised on a sustainable development framework demands **a more coherent and integrated approach** to economic, environmental and social issues. I have already demonstrated this earlier in examining the inter-connectivity of the social challenges in the Caribbean with the economic and environmental ones.

For Caribbean SIDS, the new development paradigm requires **a strategic approach in how the Caribbean identifies priorities, advocates for them, and ensures that the post-2015 development agenda** pays due and adequate regard to the specificities of vulnerabilities of SIDS as a whole.

The path to post-2015 has largely been charted starting from Rio +20. The initial inputs have come from worldwide engagement with civil society, and, the intergovernmental processes for the sustainable development goals, and sustainable developing financing.

While contours are taking shape, **the post-2015 vision and the agenda itself are yet to be concretized**. Important steps still lay ahead. Coming out of Samoa, SIDS and the international

community at large have a mandate to marshal support for the SIDS agenda within the context of post-2015. But it is not enough to rest on laurels of the S.A.M.O.A. Pathway.

Looking forward, the international community has much work to do to define a post-2015 development agenda. Negotiations are not expected to ensue apace until early 2015. Yet there is ample opportunity to weave the SIDS agenda into the post-2015 framework. It is imperative for SIDS to use the occasions of major meetings as the Secretary General's Climate Summit, the Peru Climate Change Conference and the Third International Conference on Financing for Development to strategically ensure that the international agenda supports their agenda. **The S.A.M.O.A. Pathway must not only contribute to the vision of post-2015, it must be an integral part of it.** To this end, **your political leadership will be critical and so too your solidarity.** If I may quote one from amongst you, *"No island, is an island!"*

On behalf of President Ashe, I wish you a productive dialogue today and encourage you to develop a sharp clear vision and framework for your strategic engagement in the post-2015 negotiations.

Thank you.
