

SAMOA



STATEMENT BY

**H.E. AMBASSADOR ALIIOAIGA FETURI ELISAIA
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SAMOA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**ON BEHALF OF THE
SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES OF THE
PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM GROUP**

AT THE

**COMMEMORATION OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES
"SIDS DAY"**

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE
SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

New York, 23 February 2008

Please check against delivery

Madam Chair,
Distinguished panelists,
Colleagues and friends.

My last-minute inclusion as a panelist is more by design than by choice. You see, last Friday afternoon at a meeting of Ambassadors of Pacific SIDS, through **my own stubborn insistence that the Pacific sub-region must be represented on today's panel no matter what**, my colleagues subtly, but diplomatically turned the tables against me and I soon found myself holding the short end of the stick.

Resigned to throw the towel in, I was suddenly reminded of what one of my teachers told me years ago. "Whenever you are put on the spot to make an impromptu speech, or give a presentation on a topic you know little about, don't panic but think of the challenge in terms of a mini skirt. You see Feturi, a **nice mini skirt should be short enough to be attractive and long enough to cover the essentials.**

The global economic and financial crisis

Does it and will it affect SIDS?

The answer is a resounding YES. Why? This is best illustrated by an African saying, which I'll paraphrase as follows "**it doesn't matter whether the elephants are fighting, playing or just smooching up to each other, the grass always gets trampled on, and the grass will always be hurt**"

- Put simply, while the epicenter of the financial crisis is to be found in developed countries, its impact has spared no region or country, with vulnerable groups like SIDS to suffer most acutely and disproportionately from the repercussions, while trying to cope at the same time with the imminent impact of climate change. Though SIDS are non contributors to the origins of both world phenomena, their global exposure and the ever deepening inter-dependence with the rest of the world means they are no longer immune to the combined effects of both crises.
- Understandably, there is some anxiety amongst SIDS, that the financial crisis will ultimately affect, if it hasn't already, the ODA strategies of development partners; and that due to their small scale, the impacts of any arbitrary ODA funding reductions will be very visible in both local communities and the highest levels of political representation.
- As well, the crisis will cause private financial flows to fall, foreign direct investment, tourism receipts and remittances to diminish and exports will be down both in terms of price and volume for most SIDS.

- Reassuringly, there was general understanding and a sense of accommodation at the recent Doha Review conference that the financial crisis, no matter how severe, will not affect the flow of ODA, the implementation of internationally agreed international obligations and achievement of the MDGs. Only time will tell.
- For SIDS therefore, the proposed conference in June on the World Financial Crisis and Its Impact on Development, is both timely and a must. It's an opportunity to learn from past mistakes so that the resultant financial architecture to finally emerge out of the process will be more resilient to repeats of the current crisis, and hopefully, the product of greater consultation and participation by all stakeholders.

SIDS Sustainable Development Goals.

- The "Barbados Programme of Action" and the "Mauritius Strategy for Implementation" provide a comprehensive statement on SIDS sustainable development goals and policy options. As documents negotiated and agreed to inter-governmentally, they represent a joint commitment by the development partners and the United Nations that with or without a global financial crisis, they will remain faithful to support and help implement SIDS Work Programme.

The score card on this joint commitment varies from SID to SID. While SIDS have the BPA and MSI as their common point of reference, both lack a direct funding stream commensurate with the resource needs of the SIDS Work Programme. Much is left to the goodwill of donors. The programme's implementation starts with SIDS and ends with SIDS. **Charity surely begins at home for SIDS.** Implementation is premised on the understanding that "**each country has primary responsibility for its own development**". A laudable principle indeed. But given the overwhelming range of challenges faced by SIDS and the resource constraints they continually face, this is surely a tall order.

Why? Because, without dedicated and "set-aside" access to funding, we can too often become lost in the stream of larger voices. This predicament has led at times to the BPA and MSI taking the credit for projects that are implemented through initiatives of SIDS and their partners.

But given the importance of the BPA and the MSI to SIDS and the wider UN membership, one wonders at times as to the real value place by different stakeholders on both documents and how much of each is actually known outside of the UN halls and probably a few SIDS ministries of Environment that were involved in the negotiations. Hopefully, the lack, or absence of faith, and/or knowledge about the documents internationally and locally, have not been the contributing factors for the mismatch in financial resources available relative to the real needs of SIDS on the ground. Obviously, a concerted effort is required to rectify this shortcoming and garner a stronger sense of ownership and commitment by SIDS and their

development partners to the goals and intentions of the said documents? Otherwise, the BPA and the MSI will become mere reference documents discussed and referred to only in the context of CSD meetings, and conveniently filed away until the next meeting comes around.

Some suggestions for the way forward.

- There are two sides of a coin. And admittedly, SIDS implementation structures also have imperfections, including at the national level. These can, and should be addressed, through “learning by doing” during project implementation. Given the urgency of sustainable development to SIDS, especially climate change, **we must ask that, if we do not scale up direct “action on the ground” now, then, when can we do so.**
- The key question arising from the global crisis for development partners and SIDS should be – which development project pathways are truly cost-effective? And which have now left us “spinning our wheels” without achieving measurable results?
- The role of national sustainable development strategies (and national ownership) cannot be overstated. Regional approaches are needed to share information and coordinate in a coherent manner, mechanisms must be created to facilitate direct national access/action within a shared regional commitment to established sustainable development goals, and bring in outside project management when needed.
- Development partners have their own reasons and procedures on how and where to channel their assistance. This is their prerogative. Unfortunately, some of these channels are not usually the most efficient, cost-effective or client-friendly. Based on Pacific SIDS experience to date, care should be taken to ensure that the assistance provided is channeled at the appropriate level ((i) either multilaterally through New York-based agencies, regional commissions, local UNDP offices, (ii) sub-regionally through regional organizations or (iii) nationally via bilateral arrangements).
- The bottom line should be to ensure faster project implementation and that SIDS, the intended recipients, benefit optimally from the assistance. Therein lies the challenge to encourage new and potential development partners for SIDS to think outside of the box and explore innovative and practical aid modalities that will aid quicker implementation. Take for instance the Italy, Austria and City of Milan joint Aid Programme with Pacific SIDS. The novelty of this approach is that it is largely driven, coordinated and managed by a Joint Committee of Pacific SIDS Ambassadors and their Italian, Austrian and Milan counterparts here in New York with the funding directed for immediate ***“action on the ground” focused on visible results and physical implementation.***

- Implementation strategies should utilize and strengthen local sources of expertise (perhaps in partnership with international experts, if needed). Building a sustained national ability to capture and manage projects is a critical barrier and this is best accomplished not by having more workshops, but in the implementation of projects themselves. While international expertise has a useful role, **too often outside consultants have simply “borrowed our own watch to tell us the time.”** In the long term, this is not cost-effective and does not create sustained national self-reliance.
- In many Pacific and island communities, local community structures and traditional leaders are important foundations for direct implementation of sustainable development goals. “Bottom up” sustainable development strategies should be strengthened, which interlink global goals, regional strategies and national initiatives with local consultation and traditional knowledge. This creates shared local ownership of the development process.

Climate Change as a cross-cutting issue.

- Climate change is an especially urgent issue for SIDS and is cross-cutting into areas of agriculture, food security, land and rural development. SIDS can better integrate, upscale and mainstream climate change across all development sectors if we can efficiently access Climate Change funding. We cannot leave this to chance.
- The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is directed in the MSI as a primary funding vehicle to achieve sustainable development in SIDS, and the MSI emphasizes improved SIDS access to the GEF. At the highest levels, the GEF is now aware of the need to re-tool and restructure to produce direct “action on the ground” and improved access. However, this commitment and sense of urgency must be translated to the level of implementing agencies and mechanisms, especially during the project formulation and approval process. Otherwise the much acclaimed GEF-Pacific Alliance of Sustainability (GPAS) will not free up the GEF resources so urgently required to help Pacific islands mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- The UNFCCC Adaptation Fund is to be operational soon; there is a general political commitment for SIDS access, and for funding concrete projects. However, we should carefully review and examine the initial results for SIDS of the Adaptation Fund, and adjust to address barriers that may arise.
- AOSIS has proposed a UNFCCC Multi-window financing mechanism & “Insurance” proposal to address climate change risks and impacts in SIDS; the elements of this proposal dates back to the early 1990s; current international financial commitments to climate change funding are still inadequate by tens of billions of dollars of new and additional financing; **unless funding**

commitments change, it seems possible that SIDS communities will ultimately bear the costs of climate change.

- With Climate change a truly cross-cutting issue for SIDS, it is far more cost-effective to address implementation now, as the global costs of inaction or inadequate action (due to delays related to the financial crisis) will be far greater.

RMI Review.

Next year there will be a review of the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation.

- Fine. But will it be an objective review which measures the degree of success in achieving the MSI? Will there be credible statistical data for individual SIDS to determine whether progress has been made or not? Because without solid data, SIDS will continue to remain vulnerable and disadvantaged when dealing vis-a-vis their development partners. The UN, with the resources at its disposal is best placed to undertake such data collection work and should consider doing this for the SIDS.

For a different but related reason, the need for irrefutable and widely accepted data becomes all the more important when considering the recent trend where countries that have graduated from LDC category, in the transition phase, or considered eligible for LDC graduation are mostly SIDS – one of the already recognized most vulnerable group within the UN system.

- Hopefully some of the issues highlighted in this presentation will be taken on board for serious reflection and hopefully, solutions to breathe fresh life back to MSI and BPA the blueprints for SIDS sustainability.
