

Pacific Nations Prepare for International Meeting on Small Island Developing States

The first multinational gathering leading to the 2004 International Meeting on Small Island Developing States was held in Apia, Samoa in August 2003 to review the progress achieved in ensuring the positive long-term development of small islands.

Over 100 representatives from Pacific Island nations attended the Apia meeting. Specifically, the representatives discussed progress in implementing the Barbados Programme of Action adopted in 1994, which attempted to address the host of challenges that small island states face due to their small size and fragile ecosystems, as they work towards development that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

Among the challenges facing island nations are rising sea levels, geographic isolation, environmental degradation, poor trading opportunities in a globalizing economy and limited resources – natural, human and institutional.

The UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 – the Rio Earth Summit – agreed that small islands are ‘a special case both for environment and development’ and called for a special conference to focus on these issues. The resulting Barbados Programme of Action has been used as a tool for guiding and promoting sustainable development in small island regions. Much progress has been achieved towards its implementation yet the process is not complete. There are major tasks ahead to ensure that sustainable development becomes a reality for all island communities.

In order to reach an international consensus on the steps required, the UN will convene the International Meeting in Mauritius in August/September 2004 to review the implementation of the Programme of Action. The preparatory process included regional consultations such as the Apia meeting. Countries have been preparing regional reports that will describe the actions taken, successes reached and prob-

lems encountered, and will suggest possible solutions. Each regional report was then presented to a larger gathering of all small island developing states in January 2004, from which a consolidated position was produced.

In Mauritius, the international community as a whole will discuss these recommendations, and it is hoped that a new era of cooperation for sustainable development in small islands will be ushered in, in line with the objectives of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002) and the UN Millennium Development Goals.

‘The road ahead is full of challenges’, said Manuel Dengo, Chief of the UN’s Water, Natural Resources and Small Island Developing States Branch - the Secretariat group in charge of the organization of the International Meeting in Mauritius. ‘The key aspect is for island nations themselves to demonstrate their resolve and commitment to sustainable development, and to carefully explain the policies and measures that they wish to utilize in their quest for achieving sustainable development’.

The UN is supporting this endeavour through its SIDS Unit of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Inter-agency Task Force on the Mauritius International Meeting. Technical and financial support has also been received from the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific, the UN Development Programme, the UN Environment Programme and the Government of New Zealand.

Rolando Gomez
UN Department of Public Information
New York
mediainfo@un.org;
Coral Pasisi
South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme
Apia.
coralp@sprep.org.ws
Website - www.sidsnet.org