



Statement by the Rt. Honourable Joe NATUMAN (MP)

Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu

Delivered at

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Mr. President,

Vanuatu joins with other delegations in congratulating you on your election to preside over the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States. My delegation extends our full cooperation and believes that with your leadership, we will conclude a successful conference.

On behalf of the people of the Republic of Vanuatu, allow me to express our deepest gratitude to you and to the people of Samoa for the kind hospitality accorded to our delegation at this SIDS Conference.

As a Small Island Developing State, we know that our very existence depends on inclusive and integrated policy and action that is built around globally applicable pillars and principles of sustainability. Vanuatu remains devoted to fulfilling the sustainable development commitments we have made at key United Nations conferences and summits.

At the same time, we wish to assert that as a SIDS, Vanuatu needs special consideration and support in its aspirations to provide service delivery to its 260,000 people, spread over 80 islands. Our islands are small, developing and remote; some with tele-communication coverage, most with limited infrastructure and many only reachable by boat. With this in mind, let me assure you that the responsibility for development in Vanuatu is no small job, nor is the task to ensure that our development is SUSTAINABLE.

While Vanuatu recently celebrated its 34th year of political independence, we are under no illusion that sustainable development can be achieved alone or in isolation from the global community. I applaud the “Partnerships” theme of this Third International Conference on SIDS, which is consistent with the Pacific Way of mutual respect and trust for each other.

2015 and Sustainable Development

Mr. President, 2015 is a critical year for Vanuatu and our development partners on the issues of sustainable development with an international agreement on climate change, the post-2015 development goals and a future framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) yet to be finalized.

Vanuatu recognizes the global challenge of eradicating poverty as a fundamental requirement for sustainable development. My government recognizes that our people are central to our efforts to create sustainable development. We accept that any sustainable development framework, post-2015 must be embedded in social inclusion and equity, human security and sustainable peace.

Last year, Vanuatu commenced an exhaustive and participatory national consultation with the goal to develop a home-grown National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) with inputs from all sectors within the country. The NSDP will be 15-year plan and feature green growth or the environment pillar and the cultural pillar to complement the existing pillars of economic and social pillars in our current Priorities and Action Agenda (PAA). It will also be the first plan to recognize the role of culture in development as a foundation upon which the three pillars are supported.

While SIDS can lead, contribute to and benefit from these initiatives, our development is uniquely affected by the ongoing adverse impacts of the global economic crisis, declining foreign direct investment, trade imbalances, increased indebtedness, lack of adequate transport, energy, and ICT infrastructure networks, limited human and institutional capacity, and inability to integrate effectively into the global economy, climate change, the impact of natural disasters, the high cost of imported energy, and the degradation of coastal and marine ecosystems.

Mr. President, Vanuatu calls for a transformative and inclusive development agenda that will chart the course to achieving our sustainable development aspirations that leaves no one behind. We cannot achieve this if we venture on a path of business as usual.

CLIMATE CHANGE & DISASTER RISK

Mr. President many of the most severe barriers to our nation's development derive from outside our borders. Climate change and the climate variability it brings is, in no uncertain terms, DEVASTATING my country, its people and their livelihoods. Accordingly there are terrifying security concerns related to climate change; the issue of forced displacement and migrating with dignity are in urgent need of discussion here.

With respect to LOSS and DAMAGE caused by climate change and global warming, Vanuatu is pleased with progress to date especially the establishment of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage. However, more needs to be done yet on its operation as the risks to our development are real. Our Government's creation of a highest level National Advisory Board on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction supported by a newly established Ministry of Climate Change demonstrate what we can do at the national level. Any further delay in taking action to tackle climate change and disaster risk management will only lead to greater adverse effects, increasing needs for adaptation as well as loss and damage in Small Island Developing States. Accordingly we emphasize the urgent need for the conclusion of a global climate agreement in Paris in 2015 especially the goal of universal participation to address this global challenge .

ENERGY

Mr. President, energy security for small island nations is crucial for their sustainable development. For too long, imported fossil fuels has been a core source of economic vulnerability given the prolonged period of high and volatile fuel prices.

Vanuatu calls on the international community, the United Nations system, IRENA and other pertinent stakeholders to provide more support in the areas of capacity building and technology transfer for the advancement and implementation of our national energy policies. For Vanuatu, increased international support will ensure that Vanuatu's target of 90% electrification and 65% renewable energy production by 2020 will be realized.

Changing the world's approach to energy is vital, with renewables a critical part of the global way forward. We all need to embrace the decarbonisation of energy as a means for sustainable development and to battle climate change. We need to deploy solutions that are commensurate with the challenges before us and recognize that the longer we delay the more the future costs. The systems and technologies to advance such solutions already exist. The next critical step is to formulate Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) to finance and advance a new era of sustainable growth. Vanuatu endorses the outcome of the Public Private Partnership forum held here in Samoa. For SIDS, renewables will provide, in addition to Carbon emission reductions, savings of hundreds of millions in foreign exchange by our oil-dependent nations, and contribute to poverty reduction in remote areas and outer islands.

ENVIRONMENT

Mr. President, it is no secret that Vanuatu's natural resources are limited, and so my Government is building the necessary policy architecture to ensure that our natural, social and cultural resources are used in ways that enable lasting and sustainable development by and for our people. Vanuatu's National Environment Policy, now in the process of being finalized, promotes sustainable patterns of consumption, production, protection and management of natural resources.

Mr. President, Vanuatu is particularly concerned about the issue of waste. While we are working hard to develop and pass national laws to manage these solid and chemical toxins¹, we lack capacity to effectively ensure a “cradle to grave” management approach is adhered to. Therefore Vanuatu calls for enhanced technical cooperation programmes² on wastes, including chemical and hazardous waste, ship- and aircraft-generated waste, marine plastic litter, and oil spills. My Government’s vision is for a safe, healthy, clean and greener Vanuatu!

The ocean and marine environments are a priority for my Government as we see the serious risk of irreversible damage to habitats, ecological functions, and biodiversity resulting from over-fishing, climate change, marine pollution, including marine debris, unsustainable coastal development, and unwanted impacts from resource extraction. Vanuatu has established legislation that enables indigenous communities to register and protect their marine and coastal environments, as well as setting aside our EEZ as a whale sanctuary.

HEALTH

Mr. President, my Government recognizes the importance of health as a precursor to all three pillars of sustainable development. Vanuatu is particularly concerned with the new health epidemic sweeping our country and the region: non-communicable diseases which contribute to up to 75% of national mortality. NCDs are a major burden on public health spending, the families they affect and therefore our national sustainable development aspirations. Acute challenges also remain in communicable diseases (including HIV/AIDS), environmental health, family planning, maternal and child and adolescent health, and mental health especially in programs targeting youth.

¹ Stockholm Convention Ratification, the Ozone layer Protection Bill, the Pollution Control Bill and the Waste Management Bill

² including those under the Basel Convention, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, the London Convention and Protocol, and International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships

Vanuatu joins other SIDS in calling upon the international community to support the national actions of SIDS in addressing communicable and non-communicable diseases.

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Vanuatu reaffirms its commitment to the Barbados SIDs Inter-regional meeting outcomes for the post 2015 agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the need for a people-centred agenda that focuses on engendering equality because we believe that Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment is central to Sustainable Development. This paradigm shift prioritizes the expansion of capabilities, the eradication of poverty and the reduction of all types of inequalities, and that promotes the rights and agency of women.

LDCs

Mr. President, Vanuatu, an LDC, ranks as one of the highest disaster prone country in the world. Because of its geographical location, Vanuatu is a cyclone-prone country and is inclined to frequent earth quakes and tsunami threats. Sooner or later, Vanuatu will graduate from its LDC status. Although measures are in place for a smooth transition from LDC to developing country status, it does not provide remedy to the permanent challenges of our vulnerabilities. Graduate or not, these perpetual challenges remain. Moreover, reduction in development assistance after graduation is considered punitive rather than an incentive to graduate.

The Committee for Development Policy and the international community, particularly our development partners, need to seriously consider our vulnerabilities and must therefore exercise flexibility. We call on the CDP and the international community to consider putting in place post-graduation transitional measures that will address our permanent vulnerabilities.

PARTNERSHIPS

Mr. President, we recognize that we must take ownership of our own sustainable development aspirations, just as much as we take responsibility for our challenges and our opportunities. In return, we call on our international partners to demonstrate their commitment to support our endeavors on poverty eradication and sustainable development, in recognition of the unique and particular vulnerabilities of SIDS.

While, Vanuatu recognizes the many challenges related to financing of sustainable development initiatives, our aspirations are at times limited by the endless red tape associated with international public and private funding streams. It often appears that funding modalities are designed in such a way that, unless a Nation works with a UN Implementing Agency, these funds are inaccessible. As noted in the Pacific outcome document, we also clearly accept that domestic mutual accountability and risk sharing is needed to ensure the effective and efficient use of resources. Accordingly, Vanuatu has worked comprehensively and diligently on fiscal reforms and is on the path towards accreditation as a National Implementing Entity (NIE), particularly in regards to climate change finance.

Moving forward, in genuine and durable partnerships, Vanuatu:

1. Acknowledges that SIDS will require special consideration in the post-2015 development agenda for the further implementation of the Barbados Plan, Mauritius Strategy and SAMOA Pathway, specifically on building capacity, strengthening national institutions according to national priorities, accessing and developing renewable energy and other environmentally sound technologies, and creating an enabling policy environment for sustainable development.
2. Calls for the strengthening of the long-standing bilateral and multilateral cooperation and support provided by the international community, assisting SIDS to make progress in addressing sustainable development efforts, while remaining

mindful of the importance of ensuring that a smooth graduation of a country from Least Developed Country status does not cause disruption in the development progress which that country has achieved.

3. Reaffirms its commitment through the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action , the Samoa Pathway.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Mr. President, I would like to remind us all that for most of the last century, economic growth in SIDS was fuelled by what seemed to be a certain truth: the abundance of natural resources. We deforested our way to growth. We fished our way to prosperity. We believed in consumption without consequences. Those days are clearly over for SIDS and the rest of the global community.

Vanuatu is prepared to achieve “sustainable development” by already making major changes in our lifestyles, our economic models, our social organization, and our political life. Nevertheless, SIDS are running out of time. It is time to seriously tackle climate change; time to make growth GREEN, time for a mass shift to renewable energy.

To all government and civil society leaders, development partners, private sector and academic leaders sitting here, SIDS must stay on the front line of sustainable development.

There is no time to waste. We, therefore call on the rich and powerful, who are largely responsible for sea level rise and other climate change phenomena, to please listen to island voices and take concrete action now.

I end my statement with three verses and the chorus from an old song, blowing in the wind sang by a popular music artist and I quote, *“yes and how many times can a man turn his head, pretend that he just don’t see?”*

Yes and how many deaths will it take till he knows too many people have died? The answer my friend is blowing in the wind. The answer is blowing in the wind” unquote

It is our sincere hope that the fresh and friendly winds of Samoa will blow new life of hope and action into our collective endeavor and drive our SIDS canoe to follow the Samoa SIDS pathway.

Tankio, Asul!

Soifua !

Thank you very much.