



# AUSTRALIA



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## **FIRST PREPARATORY COMMITTEE OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES 24 February 2014**

### **Australian Statement**

#### **Statement by H.E. Mr Gary Quinlan Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations**

**(Check against delivery)**

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Distinguished Co Chairs

Please let me start by congratulating you on your appointment as Co-chairs of the SIDS Conference, and to your fellow Bureau members too. Let me also take this opportunity to acknowledge Samoa, as host of the Conference, for its outstanding leadership and commitment on behalf of Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

As we all know, in 1994, the world came together in Barbados in the common understanding that Small Island Developing States face specific challenges in their path to sustainable development. But twenty years on, and despite two global SIDS conferences intended to mobilise action, many of these challenges remain. Geographic isolation, dependence on trade, limited natural resources and freshwater supplies and vulnerability to natural disasters and environmental degradation - to name a few - continue to have a restraining impact on the sustainable development prospects of SIDS.

The Third International Conference on SIDS in Samoa this September will be our opportunity to get more serious in our efforts to deliver on the promise we made twenty years ago. We must not lose sight of our common commitment, as an international community, to the crucial importance of the development of SIDS.

Australia itself is a large country geographically, but our identity as a nation and our history is deeply embedded in a region of developing countries, most of them small island states. We have seen the varied challenges they face on the ground, and we have worked in partnership with SIDS - in the Pacific and elsewhere - to try to overcome these challenges.

At the same time, we have seen the many contributions that SIDS have made regionally and internationally, and experienced first-hand some of the most valuable assets that SIDS possess - the resilience of their peoples, the richness and diversity of their cultures, and their deep knowledge as custodians of their own environment and the oceans. No-one understands better the challenges and sustainable development needs of SIDS, than SIDS themselves.

The challenges facing SIDS are significant but not insurmountable. They require sustainable development approaches tailored to the particular circumstances and characteristics of small islands.

Australia welcomes the theme of 'sustainable and durable' partnerships. Exploring innovative models for private sector, academic or philanthropic partnerships for development, allows access to a broad range of expertise and finance. Innovative financial instruments and partnership models have great potential to address complex development challenges.

Partnerships should have accountability and responsibility at their core. The Busan principles of ownership, openness, trust and mutual respect provide an important guide for effective partnerships.

For the results of the Conference to be meaningful on the ground, the outcomes will need to focus on a select number of action-oriented priorities and be concise, clear and achievable.

The Conference is also an opportunity to provide valuable inputs into other processes, such as the post-2015 development agenda. A targeted focus on SIDS issues will ensure that the Conference outcomes can complement, but not duplicate, discussions in these forums to realise the particular needs of SIDS.

As we have heard today from the SIDS themselves, achieving economic growth, gender equality, well-managed natural resources, and advances in health are important areas where progress will reap important benefits and have the potential to accelerate the sustainable development of SIDS.

Inclusive and sustainable **economic growth** drives poverty reduction, and fuels job creation and investment. **Private sector investment**, particularly, is an engine of growth. Improving access to financial services and unlocking the benefits international trade also have an important role to play.

**Education** promotes growth by increasing young people's access to jobs in national, regional and international labour markets. Access to economic and social **infrastructure** also contributes to growth and transformation.

**Debt** must also be managed sustainably to ensure it does not become a constraint on growth.

**Gender equality** remains a significant challenge, globally and in SIDS. We must use this opportunity to advance the economic empowerment of women, increase women's role in leadership, and reduce violence against them.

The sustainable management of **natural resources** is also critically important for SIDS.

**Oceans**, in particular, are an essential source of food and livelihoods, providing domestic revenue, generating local jobs and underpinning food security.

Addressing overfishing and overcapacity in international fisheries; combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; and protecting coastal and ocean habitats, are key priorities.

**Disaster risk reduction** is also fundamental to decreasing SIDS' vulnerability to natural disasters and slow-onset climate risks.

Finally, we need to join together to address the many **health** challenges that SIDS face. The rapidly growing epidemic of non-communicable diseases are causing a health crisis in many SIDS and undermining social and economic development.

To conclude,

This Conference is an opportunity to make a difference for SIDS through a spirit of collaboration and functional partnership. Australia will listen closely to the priorities of SIDS and looks forward to working with all of you towards a successful Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States.

Thank you.