

Statement by H.E. Tuiloma Neroni Slade
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to the United Nations and
Vice-Chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)
to the High Level Segment of the First Conference of the Parties
to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Berlin

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Madam President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States. First, let me congratulate you most warmly on your election to the Presidency of this, the first Conference of the Parties. We should like also to extend through you our gratitude to your Government for so magnificently hosting this Conference, and to the people of Germany and the city of Berlin for their support and hospitality.

Madame, it is with great pleasure that we look forward to this support and hospitality continuing, now that the Parties have confirmed that the city of Bonn will serve as the permanent host for our Convention Secretariat. On that note, may I also take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the offers that were graciously made by the three other Governments to host and support the Secretariat.

As we meet in Berlin we, all the Parties, must recommit ourselves to the effective implementation of the Convention and the fulfilment of our responsibilities in support of the preservation of the global climate system. For island states, this means, very simply, fighting for our right to be, for our survival, our physical integrity, and the preservation of our cultures and peoples. While the threats inherent in global warming like sea level rise will affect all of humankind, islands will be the first to feel the impact. We are therefore greatly encouraged by the opening statement by Chancellor Dr. Helmut Kohl who noted AOSIS's call for urgent

action.

Whether coral atolls or volcanic peaks, each of our islands is ringed by a fragile ribbon of coast where our cultural, economic and political life is concentrated. The scientists charged with informing the deliberations of our Conference, have warned that unless nations agree quickly and significantly to reduce global emissions of greenhouse gases, the increasing temperatures will force the level of the sea to rise and engulf this precious coast.

This Conference is a natural occasion to recall the formation of our alliance, almost five years ago during the Second World Climate Conference in Geneva. It is of course a partnership of small island states drawn from all regions of the world, sharing a number of common characteristics and extreme vulnerability to a range of external forces. In many ways, our strategic position here today is in continuum with the past. We have served as ports for trade and of conquest, and as both bases and targets for the missiles of war. Today, as we confront climate change, we find ourselves effectively in the same role, not of our choosing; facing a threat, not of our making.

The United Nations Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados last year explored a full range of the environmental and development challenges facing small islands. Island countries greatly appreciate the support of the international community that made Barbados possible, and that has given AOSIS the courage to continue to press for progress in the climate change negotiations. But, while we will continue to rely on the encouragement of statements and conferences, in the end, only concerted international action will save all of us from the impacts of climate change.

When we call for prompt and effective action to halt global warming, we speak not only for ourselves, but for the atmosphere, for the climate system, for the species of plants and animals vulnerable to climatic shifts, and for the present and future

inhabitants of regions of the world that will suffer the impacts of drought, disease and floods brought on by higher temperatures and rising seas. We island states have everything to lose and little to gain from the fate of this Convention.

The Convention presents the framework for the international community to cooperate in the preservation of the global climate system. At this first session we in AOSIS, and a very large number of other states, have concluded that the commitments in the Convention are not adequate to achieve its central objective. We must be decisive and be prepared to give meaning to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities in controlling emissions of greenhouse gases.

An important aspect of the required collective action is the strengthening of the existing commitments and the extension of the legal framework beyond the end of this decade. In this context, we are heartened by the support given by the majority of State Parties to the paper submitted by India, now being negotiated, which provides the modality for the eventual adoption of the AOSIS Protocol. We are also encouraged that a number of developed countries have expressed their support for the principles within the AOSIS protocol and for the AOSIS targets.

Madame President, AOSIS is of the view that a harmonised approach is the only way forward. Members of the international community who have pledged to take the lead must also take additional steps to support the developing countries as agreed to in the Convention, so that developing countries could meet their general commitments in support of the preservation of the Earth's climate. Poverty must be eradicated, and technology must be made available to developing countries to facilitate clean growth.

Madam President, before concluding, I wish to pay tribute to the non-governmental organisations who have remained as partners in the quest for sustainable development since Rio. At this Conference they have constantly reminded us that we are required to act now on behalf of the citizens of the earth and develop a comprehensive response to climate change. They have also reminded us that there is no wisdom in waiting for more proof.

It is our hope, Madame President, that these new partnerships, like our Alliance, will grow stronger, that the special bond we feel between ourselves will deepen and expand to include all nations; that what has become known as the AOSIS protocol, will become the world's protocol, and that all of us here -- Parties, observers, governmental and nongovernmental, public and private sector --will take on the sacred trust that is for all of us to bear and take the action necessary to protect the global climate system. □