
Statement by Pacific Island Forum Member Countries

Delivered by H.E. President Kessai H. Note

President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands

Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction

Mr. President

Honorable Colleagues,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

I am deeply honored and privileged to address the Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction on behalf of the Pacific Island countries represented here at this Conference.

Mr. President, on the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your election as President to this Conference on Disaster Reduction: And on this same high note, may I also thank our gracious host, the People and Government of Japan for the wonderful arrangements made toward this Meeting.

It is indeed befitting that this Second Conference on Disaster Reduction be held here in Kobe, memorialising the unfortunate event of 1995 and building on the unprecedented world-wide reaction to the tsunami disaster several weeks ago. Thus, today, I wish to express our condolences to the victims and families of those uneventful tribulations and to acknowledge the level of support rendered by the international community.

The Pacific Plan

Mr. President,

In June 2004, disaster managers from the Pacific Island Forum countries met to review and assess the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and to prepare a Pacific Regional Position for this Conference. As a result, the countries of the region have come to Kobe to seek the support of the international community for our consolidated plan to ensure safer and more resilient Pacific Islands communities, a

plan that entails disaster prevention and reduction through risk management and capacity strengthening.

Later this year, in the first week of June, we will meet again in Papua New Guinea for the Pacific Regional Disaster Managers Conference to reformulate this regional position, taking heed of the outcome of this Conference. Mr. President, I am confident that the June Conference in PNG will produce a regional strategy for disaster risk reduction for the next ten years.

Pacific Islands Forum Initiative

Mr. President,

On this occasion, I wish also to showcase a newly formulated Forum Leaders vision that binds together the principles that are enshrined in related international initiatives, including the Millennium Development Goals, the Barbados Program of Action, the Yokohama Strategy and the Mauritius Strategy. While this new vision affirms our collective goals and objectives toward economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security, we also acknowledge the need to ensure adequate capacity to guarantee a disaster resistant Pacific.

In this context, the Pacific Island Countries reaffirm the special case for SIDS based upon their unique vulnerabilities and the fact that our vulnerabilities are increasing. We applaud the accomplishment of the previous week in Mauritius, whereby the international community, together with SIDS Leaders, agreed to the Mauritius Strategy for further implementation of the Barbados Program of Action. We further acknowledge the important link between this strategy and the outcome document from this Conference in so far as securing support to reduce the impacts of disasters in the Pacific Region.

SIDS

Mr. President,

The Pacific Island Countries recommit themselves to the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and its Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, specifically as they relate to disasters within Small Islands Developing States. We further acknowledge the significant co-relation between disaster mitigation and

sustainable development, and hereby submit that reducing the impacts of disasters will assist in our efforts toward sustainable development and poverty reduction, thereby accelerating realization of the Millennium Development Goals. In Johannesburg, we launched a program called, "Pacific Region Partnership Initiative to Develop Capacities in Pacific SIDS to Manage Vulnerability and Build Resilience to Disasters". We remain active in promoting this partnership initiative as a means of strengthening existing and securing new partnerships.

We recognize that the nature of Pacific SIDS in the context of our big ocean and small islands contributes to our exposure to the impact of disasters at the national level. We further recognize that our unique traditions and culture have provided us with an intrinsic resilience to cope with disasters. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that the financial and social costs of disasters have increased over the past decade. And as climate variability and extreme weather events become more prominent, our exposure to new disasters increase while our capacity to deal with these remain minimal.

YOKOHAMA STRATEGY

Mr. President, we agree that the 1994 Yokohama Strategy and Action Plan for a Safer World is still relevant but there are now current and emerging issues to be addressed as reflected in the Pacific Review prepared for the Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction.

We now recognize a broader definition of disasters to include not only those resulting from natural hazards but also social, environmental and technological hazards. This concept requires our capacities to be strengthened collaboratively with existing public health and medical care systems to address health hazards.

We accept that disaster prevention and mitigation initiatives are our national responsibility, but we need regional cooperation and support from the international community with technical capacity and resources. We therefore call upon our partners to continue and strengthen, where possible, their support.

Mr. President, as requested in the Mauritius Strategy, there is need to ensure SIDS specific concerns are addressed in this Conference and we are pleased to note that a special session on SIDS will take place Thursday morning. However, in order to

ensure, without a doubt, the link to the Mauritius Strategy and this Conference, it is desirable to have a SIDS specific paragraph in the implementation section of the Conference outcome document. In this regard I am pleased to note that this is allowed for in the consideration of paragraphs 21 and 22 of the draft outcomes document, as indicated in the Conference Thematic Segment Timetable document. I can assure you that Pacific Island Countries are working closely with AOSIS colleagues to provide language for such a paragraph as an outcome for the Thursday meeting.

CONCLUSION

Mr. President,

Preparing for natural disasters is hollow in the smaller countries without cooperation and support from the international community. We continue to experience the affects from changes in weather patterns and erosion, and are working hard to prevent and ultimately reverse the affects of global warming. However, without such global actions to mitigate climate change and arrest sea level rise, our national efforts at sustainable development and disaster readiness will be rendered meaningless, and my people and the entire region will become environmental refugees.

Finally Mr. President,

Let me express my deep appreciation to the international community and the people and government of Japan for their contributions to assist in making the Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction, here in Kobe, a success.

I thank you.