

“We are all inhabitants of the global island” – Kofi Annan

The Secretary-General proposes a global warning system that would not just cover tsunamis

In his address to the high-level segment of the International Meeting on small island developing States today 13 January in Mauritius, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan mentioned that he had just visited some of the places that were hit the hardest by the 26 December tsunami. “What I witnessed was just a tiny sampling of what took place,” he said. “We human beings have been humbled yet again by the power of nature to alter, in an instant, our lives and the very face of the earth.”

The Secretary-General added: “This tragedy has taught us once again the need for prevention and early warning. Last week’s meeting in Jakarta called for the establishment of a regional early warning system for the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. But we should do even more. We need a global warning system – and one that covers not just tsunamis but all other threats, such as storm surges and cyclones. In such an endeavour, no part of the world should be ignored. We must think globally, and consider measures equal to the task”.

Mr. Annan also added: “We are all inhabitants of the global island. All of us, rich and poor, weak and strong, whether citizens of great power or tiny atoll, are linked in webs of opportunity and vulnerability. We should have known this already, but it has taken a tsunami to press the point home. The question now is whether we will act over the long term, not just in small islands but everywhere, in the same spirit of unity that characterizes the current moment.”

To conclude, the Secretary-General said this: “If any good should come from the upheaval caused by the tsunami, I hope it will be to have proven, once and for all, the need to heed the warning signs, come together well in advance of calamity, and sustain a collection effort to end human misery and build strong foundations for development and peace.”

Unanimous agreement on the content of the Mauritius Strategy

It can be confirmed that the Mauritius outcome document will be adopted at unanimity. This morning at 6:00am in Mauritius, after a whole night of negotiation, a sub-group came up with an agreement on the last contentious issue of the conference, climate change. Later today (Thursday), the Committee of the whole of the Mauritius International Meeting endorsed a number of trade-offs on issues such as climate change, trade and the maritime transportation of radioactive materials.

The newly-agreed text indicates that Small Island Developing States, or SIDS, “believe that they are already experiencing major adverse effects of climate change” and that “adaptation to adverse impacts of climate change and sea-level rise remains a major priority” for them. It also promotes “increased energy efficiency and development and use of renewable energy as a matter of priority, as well as advanced and cleaner fossil fuel technologies.”

On trade issues, the Draft Strategy document, which will be formally approved on Friday, recognizes that “most small island developing States, as a result of their smallness, persistent structural disadvantages and vulnerabilities, face specific difficulties in integrating into the global economy.” The document also recognizes “the importance of intensifying efforts to facilitate the full and effective participation” by small island developing States “in the deliberations and decision-making process of the World Trade Organization.”

On another issue, the Draft Strategy now states the following: “The international community notes that cessation of transport of radioactive materials through SIDS regions is an ultimate desire of SIDS and some other countries, and recognizes the right of freedom of negotiation in accordance with international law.”