

**Briefing Notes – AOSIS representative**  
**UNESCO Oceans Side Event**  
**UNESCO General Conference**  
**November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 – Paris**

[Salutation]

The Blueprint for Ocean and Coastal Sustainability, otherwise known as the Blue Paper, launched here today in Paris, and produced as a result of a collaboration between our hosts, UNESCO, as well as other instrumental agencies including the UNDP, FAO, IOC and IMO provides an excellent guide for approaching discussions on oceans management within the context of sustainable development – especially leading up to next June’s Rio+20 meeting whose themes of 1) *green economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication* and 2) *institutional strengthening for sustainable development* are critical to the development of small island developing states.

It is indeed an honour to address this important side event and endorse the much needed focus on oceans for Rio+20 on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, in place of Her Excellency Ambassador Dessima Williams, Permanent Representative of Grenada to the United Nations and Chair of AOSIS – an outspoken, dedicated and consistent advocate for the improvement of oceans management especially as it relates to bringing about the critical changes necessary to protect our ecologically and economically fragile and climate vulnerable islands. It is imperative that we all recognize that for SIDS, our oceans are not just what define us geographically but also what define us culturally, socially and economically. We cannot advance toward a sustainable developmental agenda without advocating for the improvement of oceans management.

The IPCC fourth assessment report warns of the projected destructive impacts of further increasing climate globally – stressing especially the grave and devastating projected impacts of a 2 – 4 degrees C increase in global temperature on those most vulnerable nations whose livelihoods and culture are dependent on the water that surrounds them. Those most vulnerable nations are the susceptible developing small islands of the world – our home - the unique oceans based nations, whose traditions of fishing, tropical agriculture, cultural tourism, coastal living and whose own existence – is currently challenged and will continue to be severely challenged by rising seas, elevated temperatures and increased vulnerability to more intense natural disasters.

Bear in mind that not only do we have to deal with the devastating impacts of global warming in recent years but also the negative backlash of the global financial crisis which has crippled some of our economies and afflicted us with high unemployment and poverty!

Today we would like to highlight the urgent need for action and the importance of approaching sustainable development within a multidimensional framework that considers the threats of climate change (especially as it relates to our oceans) and sees that the mandates of climate change adaptation and sustainable development is absorbed into the national developmental objectives of all our islands. Thus, as we revisit our progress towards integrating sustainability into our national development at Rio, I'd like to share with you what *we've accomplished as SIDS, what we still need to accomplish and major gaps in our preparation* for increasing our resilience and adapting to climate change alongside incorporating sustainability into our developmental mandates.

The roadmap for transitioning our development to include key sustainable elements is defined by the objectives of the 1994 Barbados

Plan of Action and the 2005 Mauritius Strategy. Emphasis was placed on the need to establish, strengthen and reform policy on coastal zone management, improve scientific and research analysis on marine and coastal environments, develop and implement comprehensive monitoring for coastal and oceans ecosystems and strengthen both national capacity and necessary assistance to SIDS. Section IV of the Mauritius Strategy further calls for the need to develop sustainable, responsible fisheries together with effective monitoring, reporting and enforcement, as well as the importance of necessary financial and technical assistance from the international community to improve technical and expert capacity. Finally Section IV stresses the importance of regional and international collaboration in oceans monitoring and the critical need to establish a regional network of marine protected areas.

Since reaffirming our commitments to improving our sustainable mandates via the Mauritius Strategy, according to the comprehensive report, ‘Oceans and Rio+20’, published by the Global Oceans Forum, a contributor to the Blue Paper, 100% of SIDS have ratified the UNFCCC Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Convention of Biological Diversity and 95% of SIDS have ratified UNCLOS – Internationally we have shown our commitment.

63% of SIDS have developed National Sustainable Development Plans and 40% have developed initiatives for integrated coastal management - with 7% having enacted National Coastal Zone Acts – Nationally we have recognized the importance of a sustainable agenda yet we still fall short of implementation.

29% of SIDS have enacted legislation on watershed planning and 27% of SIDS have developed specific institutions and mechanisms for the coordination of coastal and oceans management – We have improved our institutional framework yet more work needs to be done.

Most disturbing is that only 10% of SIDS have produced an assessment on the socio-economic impact of sea-level rise and climate change and 32% have early warning systems for disasters in place – While we’ve recognized the threats we face we have yet to put in place effective monitoring and necessary analysis to protect against future disasters. This indeed is a terrifying fact! Not only are we still without the necessary legislative and institutional framework to address critical developmental issues, we have yet to implement the necessary steps to protect, adapt and increase our resilience – in other words we have yet to take aggressive and timely action!

Due to our current limitations, the overall extent of efforts and progress by SIDS in readying their nations for the impacts of climate change and sustainable development have been described as “medium” and goals reached as having “some delay.”

For SIDS, this slow paced or “medium” approach to incorporating sustainable mandates into our national development initiatives is directly related to critical insufficiencies, which we continue to address – however it is important to point out that we cannot address them on our own. These insufficiencies include:

- Inadequate institutional support to institute necessary policy, enforcement and compliance,
- Lack of capacity – specifically technical and expert capacity,
- Lack of adequate necessary training and education, technologies and knowledge transfer and access to adequate financing,

- Inability to benefit from resources within our Exclusive Economic Zone

Unless we remedy these key issues SIDS will continue to lack the supportive crutch necessary to allow us to move forward and ensure our survival. We therefore call on the international community to continue to assist us in bridging those gaps by following through on your financing, technology and knowledge transfer, capacity building and emissions reductions pledges!

In preparation for Rio+20 many have called on the approach to a green economy, including the Blue Paper, which, states that by definition, a green economy “fully internalizes the externalities of environmental degradation into the prices of goods and services,” and that any transition toward a green economy requires a merging of physical, behavioral and institutional changes. AOSIS supports the proposal made by the Blue Paper that any concepts of sustainable development or green economy must incorporate oceans. Additionally we welcome all proposals that assist in promoting “green tourism” or eco - tourism as a poverty eradication mechanism. We believe that especially for our island nations, tourism is key in allowing us to accomplish the goals of conservation, protection and adaptation via sustainable development and climate adaptation initiatives while injecting much needed vitality into our economic sectors and helping us satisfy our Millennium Development Goals!

The Blue Paper echoes the statement made recently in New York by Mr. Taleb Rifai, the Secretary General of the UN World Tourism Organization, who sees the economic significance of tourism to SIDS and its ability to have a multiplier effect in the stimulation of other sectors. Mr. Rifai stressed the need for SIDS to anchor tourism within

local communities and institute local policies that promote national investment and ensure that what is created by SIDS benefits SIDS.

We support the objective of the Blue Paper to “contribute to the international debate on oceans” by providing expert opinion and presenting options and important proposals:

- We acknowledge that the key issues affecting ocean sustainability include unsustainable fishing, climate change and ocean acidification, pollution and waste, loss of habitats and biodiversity and introduction of invasive species within SIDS – We’d like the international community to acknowledge that SIDS is ready to take advantage of the social, environmental and economic incentives of a sustainable or “green” fishing industry within an improved oceans management framework especially as it assists in poverty alleviation and combating malnutrition.
- We also acknowledge that more attention should be placed on the need for additional research on the impacts of ocean acidification for SIDS. While much attention has been placed on the atmospheric impacts of greenhouse gases we support the focus by the Blue Paper to highlight the additional detrimental impacts of greenhouse gases absorbed by the ocean.
- SIDS face the constant battle over ways to develop their coastal lands for economic gain and a focus on the detriment of habitat loss such as mangroves and sea grasses should continually be re-emphasized.

- We support the acknowledgement of the role of science and technology in sustainable development.
- We welcome the proposals on how the private sector can assist us in achieving our objectives and the emphasis on the role of tourism in “greening: our economy. Finally,
- We support the strengthening of governance and institutional structures.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank UNESCO and partners for their efforts in recognizing the developmental gaps within SIDS and presenting the proposals put forth in the Blue Paper that focus on bridging those gaps. It is important that as we prepare for Rio+20 that we not only do so with Oceans being prominent on the agenda but that we come prepared with solid proposals to address our most significant problems. It is our job as AOSIS to inform the international community at Rio that without addressing the current gaps in our progress we are unable to move forward. We therefore need our voices to be heard! For SIDS - it is time to take assertive action!

I implore the international community to respond by endorsing the emphasis of a focus on oceans for Rio+20 and recognizing your responsibility to assist SIDS in protecting our unique cultures, richly diverse ecosystems and resilient population within an environment - rendered ecologically fragile by anthropogenic influence!

I thank you!