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UNESCO'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE MAURITIUS STRATEGY FOR THE FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS)

SUMMARY

This item has been included in the provisional agenda of the 185th session of the Executive Board at the request of Seychelles. The explanatory note prepared by this Member State is attached. A draft decision is to follow.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

1. In 1994, during the first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island States held in Barbados, the international community acknowledged that Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face growing economic, environmental, social and developmental vulnerabilities linked to their small size, remoteness, narrow resource base, exposure to global environment challenges and vulnerability to external (demand and supply-side) shocks. The Barbados Plan of Action (BPoA) set forth a series of specific actions and measures at the national, regional, and international levels in support of the sustainable development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

2. In January 2005, the United Nations convened a High-Level Meeting in Mauritius to review the implementation of the programme of action for the sustainable development of SIDS. It was found that progress towards the implementation of BPoA has been uneven and not entirely successful due to the acute nature of a series of past and new and emerging challenges continuously being faced by SIDS in their pursuit of sustainable development. The BPoA was therefore reviewed and the Mauritius Strategy was henceforth adopted. This new international road map addressed the vulnerabilities of SIDS in terms of 19 themes and 7 means of implementation.

3. In this context, UNESCO, as part of the wider United Nations commitment to support SIDS both at the international policy level and on the ground through its agencies and technical cooperation projects, assigned SIDS a priority status in its Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013. Moreover, in an effort to provide a consolidated contribution towards the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy, an intersectoral platform on the follow-up of the Mauritius Strategy for the Sustainable Development of SIDS was put in place by the UNESCO Secretariat. In addition, a SIDS Committee of Representatives to UNESCO was set-up in 2006 to galvanize a more focused approach to SIDS policy development.

3. Five years after the adoption of the Mauritius Strategy, the United Nations convened this year another assessment to discuss the progress made, and to map out a way forward. The regional review meetings already organized in the three SIDS regions of the Caribbean, Pacific and AIMS, followed by the interregional consultation meetings, culminated in a high-level review meeting held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 24 and 25 September 2010 during the 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. The ensuing United Nations Secretary General's report entitled "Five-year review of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States", as well as the Political Declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25th September 2010, reviewed the progress made, lessons learned and constraints encountered in the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy. Critically, it also set-out a road map on what needs to be done to further address the vulnerabilities of SIDS.

4. Overall, the five-year review of the Mauritius Strategy revealed that many of the hard-earned gains achieved by SIDS in the areas of education, health, gender and environment are today severely threatened by the adverse impact of climate change and natural disasters, compounded by the recent global food, fuel and financial crises. The overall progress towards achieving the MDGs was also found to be uneven. In addition, support allocated by the international community has fallen short of the mounting challenges faced by SIDS, including those generated by the effects of climate change. The review also revealed that SIDS have made less progress than most other groupings, or-even regressed, in economic terms, especially with respect to poverty reduction and debt restructuring/sustainability. Consideration must now be given to exploring new measures including, *inter alia*, strengthening access to, and the provision of, sustainable financial resources to SIDS and institutionalizing special support towards capacity-building on the ground in SIDS. A concomitant review, on an international scale, into the effectiveness of existing support systems and processes should also be considered, as a means of creating an optimal level of

integration, harmonization and coherence in the support mechanisms behind the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy.

6. Consequently, it has become essential that UNESCO, within the framework of its mandate, and where appropriate, draws on the conclusions of the review process to set sharper priorities and identify the gaps that still need to be filled in its SIDS work programme in order to ensure that SIDS receive the relevant and timely support in the face of increasing risks and vulnerabilities.

7. It also seems appropriate that UNESCO continues to make productive use of the existing SIDS Committee of Representatives to UNESCO, comprising SIDS delegates in Paris and the UNESCO Secretariat, as a basis for a more focused and targeted approach to policy development in the SIDS regions, drawing on UNESCO's core competencies and mandate.