

# Remarks by Ambassador Rick Barton, U.S. Representative to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, at the Opening Session of the High-Level Review Meeting on the Implementation of the Mauritius Strategy

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Thank you Mr. President. Madame Deputy Secretary General, distinguished delegates, the United States applauds the progress Small Island Developing States have made in fulfilling the Mauritius Strategy over the past five years. We appreciate the opportunity to reflect on progress made, and we are proud of our robust partnerships with SIDS around the world. We look forward to working together to address the steps remaining to achieve the goals of sustainable development. In particular, the United States want to highlight our partnering with SIDS on work in disaster preparedness, biodiversity, and climate change.

The United States seeks to help SIDS build resiliency against both extreme natural events – such as hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes – as well as unknown future challenges. We work closely with our partners in the Caribbean and Pacific to support the collection of data using sensors and satellites, recorders and buoys, weather balloons and water samples, and, using that data, conduct the research it takes to improve our collective understanding of the Earth systems we depend on, and our ability to predict and forecast normal and extreme events.

Our SIDS partners are key to these efforts. The areas of our planet which are least observed are the large expanses of ocean. These areas are essential to our understanding of the climate system, and therefore, to our ability to understand what we can expect from a changing climate, making it possible for us all to take action to mitigate and adapt in the face of that change. This would not be possible without the active engagement of SIDS and regional collaboration in a global context.

The United States shares the SIDS commitment to the preservation of biodiversity. The United States contributes more than \$300 million annually to our development partners for biodiversity conservation. We applaud the strong leadership demonstrated by SIDS through

their own efforts and by their focusing global attention on coral reefs and marine conservation through initiatives such as the International Coral Reef Initiative, the **Micronesia Challenge**, and the Coral Triangle Initiative. The United States has supported the Global Island Partnership since its launch in 2006. We share the Partnership's strategic priorities for integrating policy and action on island conservation and sustainable livelihoods, ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation, and addressing the threat of invasive alien species.

SIDS are especially vulnerable to the impacts of invasive alien species on biodiversity, ecosystems, agriculture, trade, and human health. Invasive alien species increase the vulnerability of native and endemic species in SIDS to extinction. From 70 to 95 percent of the world's terrestrial species extinctions have occurred on islands, and most of these were directly caused or facilitated by invasive species. However, the physical isolation of islands allows them to implement measures that prevent the establishment of invasive alien species or eradicate them after introduction. The United States recognizes the truly cross-cutting nature of threats posed by invasive alien species and the continuing need for them to be addressed at regional and global scales. We will continue to partner with SIDS to develop methods and lessons learned in addressing invasive alien species – lessons that could be applied to non-SIDS countries as well.

President Obama believes the future lies in our making the transition to a green economy. As the United States pursues multiple paths towards achieving this goal, we will continue to support SIDS in their efforts to green their economies. Many SIDS are endowed with extensive potential renewable energy resources. Renewable energy promises to reduce SIDS' dependence on imported fuels for transportation and electricity generation that have led to severe trade imbalances. We continue to support technical assistance as well as support international financing efforts – including access to investment funds –to assist SIDS in developing their renewable energy resources and achieve their sustainable development goals.

President Obama is also committed to addressing climate change more broadly through the balance that he and other leaders agreed to in Copenhagen at the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The United States strongly believes that this balance must be maintained if we are to move forward on the issue. We are firmly committed to working with SIDS to put in place a robust, comprehensive, and sustainable regime that delivers significant mitigation actions by all major economies, ensures such actions are carried out in a transparent manner, and provides a framework of support for developing countries in their efforts to mitigate and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change.

On this last point, the United States recognizes the significant threat that climate change poses to the development of SIDS and, for certain low-lying island states, their long-term viability. For instance, we recognize that access to clean water is made even more challenging by climate change due to rising sea levels, salt water intrusion, and changes in precipitation patterns. The economic challenge of providing adequate water and wastewater infrastructure is a serious burden for many SIDS. We take these threats seriously and are making SIDS a focus of our efforts to expand bilateral and multilateral adaptation assistance. We will commit, in fiscal year 10 to 11, \$100 million to help vulnerable SIDS adapt and build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

When we met in Mauritius in 2005, we were in the middle of the immediate aftermath of the tsunami. Today, we recall other recent disasters – the earthquake that struck Haiti, and the tsunami that struck Samoa, Tonga, and American Samoa. In each of these tragedies, we take strength from the collective efforts of the international community to prepare and respond to the disasters.

We do not know what the future holds. We can assume that we will be surprised by unanticipated events. The Mauritius Strategy provides a guide to preparing for that unknown future. The United States seeks to be a reliable partner with SIDS as they achieve their sustainable development goals and prepare for the challenges ahead.

Thank you.