

Mr Ronny Jumeau
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Mr President,
Your Excellency Mr. Camsek Elias Chin, Vice President of Palau,
Mr. Klaus Topfer, Executive Director of United Nations Environment Programme,
Mr. Len Good, Chief Executive Office of the Global Environment Facility,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A warm welcome to you all to this side event on coral reefs, without which we would not even have a meeting of small island developing states meeting, for there would be hardly any SIDS to meet.

Make no mistake about it, devastating as the tsunami of 26th December was - and our hearts go out to our dear neighbour the Maldives for the loss of life and destruction they suffered and the anguish they continue to suffer – the long term environmental threats to the survival of the small island developing states will continue to be climate change, global warming, sea level rise and the death of our coral reefs.

Turning closer to home, I regret I cannot tell you yet how much damage the South Asian tsunami has done to our coral reefs and marine ecosystems in Seychelles. What we do know, is that when the giant waves stormed across our reefs that terrifying day, our corals were still struggling to recover from the devastating El Niño event of 1998.

Up to 98% of our corals were destroyed in 1998, and that in a small island developing state where the two mainstays of our exceedingly fragile economy, our fisheries and tourism industries, are overwhelmingly dependent on the health of our reefs and marine ecosystems.

It was this dire threat to our survival, both economic and physical (since our coral reefs are our first and most important defence against the increasing erosion and flooding caused by sea level rise), it was this dire threat which:

- pushed Seychelles to become the first small island developing state to bid for co-chairmanship of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) along with the United Kingdom;
- convinced President Michel to co-write the foreword to the recently published 2004 report on the Status of Coral Reefs of the World along with President Tommy Remengesau of Palau, the incoming co-chair of ICRI along with Japan;
- prompted Seychelles to use its co-leadership of ICRI to champion a Small Island States Resolution on Coral Reefs for this week's BPOA+10 meeting in Mauritius; and led us to initiate this side event to raise awareness at the highest political level of the threats to coral reefs and galvanise commitment to the worldwide effort to save these unique ecosystems.

We small island developing states cannot afford to love coral reefs just because they are pretty or even because the richness of their biodiversity is unmatched by any other ecosystem on Earth, important to science and mankind as this may be. We SIDS have to face the stark and undeniable truth that without coral reefs, the economies of many small island developing states and the livelihoods of other coastal communities will collapse.

If we allow the corals to die, thousands of islands across the globe and in every ocean will one day disappear along with whole countries, innumerable communities and entire cultures.

But it is not all gloom and doom. A lot of work has been done on coral reefs under ICRI's umbrella these past ten years, and especially since the 1998 El Niño. These include, in the Indian Ocean alone, the Coral Reef Degradation of the Indian Ocean, or CORDIO, programme, the Commission de l'Océan Indien's GEF project, the contribution of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) through the Regional Seas Nairobi Convention, the International Coral Reef Action Network's (ICRAN's) demonstration sites in the Seychelles, Madagascar and Zanzibar, the GEF-funded Seychelles Marine Ecosystem Management Programme or SEYMEMP, and the UK-funded Aldabra Marine Programme, among others.

Islands, Reefs and Communities: Committing to the Future

Side Event at the Mauritius International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

13 January 2005, Mauritius

ICRI owes a large debt of gratitude for the financial support it has received from countries such as the United States, Australia, Sweden and France, as well as institutional support from UNEP, the World Bank, the IUCN-World Conservation Union, the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature, the Nature Conservancy, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

Our aim today is to convince even more of you to wade in alongside ICRI and the Small Island Developing States to help us save the world's coral reefs and other critical marine ecosystems, so as to ensure there are just as many of us SIDS and coastal communities around in another decade or more from now.

As we celebrate 10 years of ICRI, let us commit ourselves today, our countries and our organisations, SIDS and the international community, so that 20 years down the road from Barbados, we can mark the 20th anniversary of ICRI with clear proof that the new partnerships we shall form will have well and truly made a difference.

Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to end by stating what a rewarding experience it has been for Seychelles to share the co-chairmanship of ICRI with the United Kingdom these past two years. I would like to call on Mr Bill Rammell, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the UK; to come forward to accept this small gift as a token of our deep appreciation and to say a few words on behalf of the UK Government.