

Deputy UN chief urges increased global support for small island developing States



Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro

26 September 2010 – Economic, environmental and social vulnerabilities in small island developing States (SIDS) have deteriorated during the past 10 years, undermining their capacity to achieve the globally agreed development targets, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro has said, urging the international community to provide more support to those countries.

External shocks, including the impacts of the global financial crisis, the food and fuel crises and climate change have exacerbated SIDS' vulnerabilities, leaving the viability and very physical existence of some of them at stake, Ms. Migiro said yesterday, giving an overview of issues addressed at a two-day meeting on SIDS held on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly's high-level debate in New York.

The meeting was convened to review the Mauritius Strategy adopted in 2005 to advance sustainable development among the vulnerable group of countries. Small island developing States face unique vulnerabilities as a result of their small size, isolation, narrow resource base, limitations on economies of scale, and high exposure to global environmental threats.

The review meeting reaffirmed the need for the international community to continue to address and support the unique and particular vulnerabilities of SIDS, which were recognized at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and underscored in Barbados in 1994 and again in Mauritius five years ago.

"Substantial progress has been made in implementing the Mauritius Strategy, which is directly linked to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)," Ms. Migiro said. "However, renewed efforts are needed to live up to promises and commitments made in the recent past," she added.

At the meeting, it was acknowledged that SIDS had demonstrated strong political commitment to continue to do their part in building resilience to their special vulnerabilities. However, there is a clear need to bridge the gaps in implementation with coordinated and sustainable support from the international community.

Discussions highlighted a number of priorities, including: Defining measurable goals and indicators for monitoring and evaluation, and strengthening capacities for data collection and analysis; scaling up resources made available to SIDS including for meeting new challenges; enhancing strategic partnerships, and monitoring and coordination mechanisms, especially at the regional level and within the UN system, for example through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD).

Other recommendation include strengthening South-South cooperation, including among SIDS; placing a special focus on a number of sub-areas, including climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity,

natural disasters, sustainable energy, transport and trade, marine and coastal resources, fisheries, tourism, finance and debt sustainability.

Highly vulnerable SIDS face a number of practical challenges and yet are often not eligible for special financing or other resources. In this respect, the discussions highlighted the need to develop a SIDS vulnerability index.

Middle-income SIDS face special challenges in the absence of international support measures, commensurate with their high vulnerability. In this context, it was felt by many participants that consideration should be given to exploring formal UN recognition of SIDS as a special category, to be tied to preferential treatment and access to concessionary financing, debt relief, trade, special programmes, and to development assistance, without prejudice to the needs of other vulnerable economies.

The review also highlighted shortcomings in institutional support for SIDS and constraints to the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy and Barbados Programme of Action. A comprehensive review of such Strategy and concrete recommendations for action are needed.

Ms. Migiro said the UN, in partnership with the members of the Inter-agency Consultative Group, which includes all key UN agencies as well as inter-governmental and regional organizations, is committed to providing strong, coherent and coordinated support to those efforts.

"The issues facing SIDS are truly global issues that affect us all. Let us work together to achieve in small island developing States a model of sustainable development with lessons and benefits for all," Ms. Migiro said.

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