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SMALL ISLAND STATES WELCOME GROWING SUPPORT FOR 1.5°C CLIMATE TARGET

11 September 2009, New York – The 42-member Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) – a key negotiating bloc in international climate negotiations – has welcomed growing support for its call to limit global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius (°C).

Speaking at a seminar in New York yesterday to prepare vulnerable country negotiators for upcoming talks in the lead-up to the crucial UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen this December, Ambassador Dessima Williams, Permanent Representative of Grenada and Chair of AOSIS, touted **‘1.5 to stay alive’** as the mantra guiding the AOSIS approach to the negotiations.

Limiting warming to below 1.5°C would require that concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere be limited to below 350 parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide-equivalent. This is well below the 2°C and 450 ppm targets promoted by many industrialised countries. Current pledges for emissions reductions put forward by these countries risk temperature increases in excess of 3°C.

The U.N.’s leading climate scientist and Chair of the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Rajendra Pachauri, has supported the AOSIS position, saying recently in an interview that “what is happening, and what is likely to happen, convinces me that the world must be really ambitious and determined at moving towards a 350 [ppm] target.”

In a separate interview this week, renowned British economist and climate change expert Lord Nicholas Stern said: “It is most important to stop the increase of flows of emissions short term and then start the decline of flows of annual emissions and get them down to levels which will move concentrations of CO₂ back down towards 350 ppm.”

“These statements further vindicate what we have been saying all along,” said Ambassador Williams, noting also that World Council of Churches has recently joined the call to limit global warming to 1.5°C. “The IPCC’s estimates are now two years old. More recent science shows that we are on track for sea-level rise of at least one and maybe two meters by the end of the century. That would spell disaster, even disappearance, for some of our islands.”

“If the science is moving, so too must world leaders” added Ambassador Williams, who is currently preparing for a meeting of AOSIS Leaders in New York on 21 September, the day before the largest-ever gathering of world leaders on climate change. The 22 September ‘Climate Summit’ is being convened by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to give a push to this year’s idling negotiations.



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AOSIS was joined earlier this year by the Group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) – a total of some 80 countries – in demanding that global temperature increases be kept as far below 1.5°C as possible to limit the anticipated devastating effects of climate change on the world’s most vulnerable countries.

Serious adverse impacts are already being felt by island states at the current 0.8°C of warming, including coastal erosion, flooding, coral bleaching and more frequent and intense extreme weather events. The U.N.’s lead agency on refugees has already warned that some particularly low-lying island states are ‘very likely to become entirely uninhabitable’.

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