

## SIDS4 Highlights: Wednesday, 29 May 2024

The Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) met in plenary throughout the day, with two interactive dialogues held in parallel. A forum on civil society was offered as a special event in the evening. Numerous side events were held through the day and evening. A cultural village that featured culinary offerings, fashion, craft, art, and entertainment was available in the afternoon.

### General Debate

On the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS), speakers said it:

- provides the platform to transfer SIDS' challenges into opportunities;
- must help build a sustainable and resilient tourism model;
- will require increased synergies and coordination at national, regional, and international levels; and
- is a call to action for early warning systems.

Moreover, interventions highlighted the importance of disaster risk reduction (DRR) to:

- graduate countries from the Least Developed Countries category;
- ensure that local communities benefit from commitments;
- incorporate technology such as remote sensing; and
- reap the benefits of natural ecosystems.

Palau President Surangel Whipps, Jr., with the PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM, urged ratification of the treaty on Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). Whipps also called for a moratorium on deep-sea mining, and noted the Blue Pacific Prosperity initiative hopes to secure an additional USD 500 million by August 2024.

SWEDEN highlighted its goal to be climate-neutral by 2045, and noted its contributions to climate finance, saying, "Those most in need of climate funds should be first in line."

INTERPOL highlighted the Small Islands' Lighthouse programme, which provides technical assistance, capacity building, and operational support in environmental security, maritime security, and cultural heritage protection. The INTERNATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY AGENCY praised SIDS for reaching 8.8 GW in renewables deployment, on track to achieve their original target of 10 GW by 2030.

The COMMONWEALTH said she was seeking new, practical ways to help the 33 small state members to access finance, such as the Climate Finance Access Hub.

The WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION called attention to the disproportionate rates of non-communicable diseases and mental health conditions afflicting SIDS populations and called for effective policies and regulations to reduce obesity rates in SIDS driven by consumption of highly processed food products.

The INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY pointed to nuclear science and technology applications that help detect cancer, provide clean drinking water, and achieve a diversified energy mix.

The WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION stressed the importance of using intellectual property to nurture creativity ecosystems, foster innovation and build markets at home and abroad.

The BASEL, ROTTERDAM AND STOCKHOLM CONVENTIONS highlighted waste as a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and noted SIDS' lack of land to sustainably manage waste.

The UN EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION highlighted its numerous initiatives in support of SIDS' priorities, including environmental education to help make schools and learners "climate-ready."

Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary, UN FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (UNFCCC), called for facilitating the flow of climate funds and emphasized National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) to ensure alignment.

Noting prolonged drought and forecasts for major hurricanes and near-record heat, the CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM), emphasized that countries responsible for climate change must take action to reduce their own emissions.

The UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP) identified some of its key focal areas for SIDS, including climate adaptation, pollution, and the sustainable blue economy.

The INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION emphasized its readiness to cooperate with governments, international financial institutions, and the private sector to advance just transition, promote sustainable enterprises, and generate jobs.

The UN POPULATION FUND said aligning data and statistics with policy formulation can help address demographic shifts, such as aging and outmigration, which pose developmental challenges and risk depletion of critical skill sets.

The WORLD BANK pointed to its climate resilient debt clause, which allow deferring payments of principal and interest for up to two years to allow countries to focus on recovery.

The UN WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION noted its task under ABAS to help build a sustainable and resilient tourism model that supports socioeconomic development and preserves SIDS' environmental and cultural heritages.

Multiple speakers pledged their support to the SIDS Center of Excellence through: South-South cooperation; providing access to emergency mapping services and satellite resources; and the Santiago Network for Loss and Damage.

The UN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP) announced a commitment, with Global Environment Fund, of USD 135 million, to support 15 SIDS on the blue and green economy.

The INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTER (ITC) emphasized the need for well-defined trade strategies that prioritize SIDS, data-driven policy, and support for local food systems.

The FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION of the UN noted that its Hand-in-Hand Initiative facilitates agricultural transformation for 12 SIDS.

UNDRR highlighted the need for resilient infrastructure and adequate funding for DRR.

NIGERIA said SIDS can take the lead while moving to a green economy, and emphasized strengthening regional cooperation, sharing best practices, and access to tailored financial mechanisms.

VENEZUELA objected to measures by some countries that limit trade and technology transfer, and said it was fundamental for developed countries to meet their obligations for financing the Loss and Damage Fund.

BRAZIL highlighted the priorities for its G20 Presidency, including just energy transition, poverty and hunger eradication, and global governance reform.

The INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE warned species loss is: irreversible; a much larger challenge than climate change; and existential for SIDS, which largely depend on pristine environments for their economies.

The UN INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION said the recently launched Global SIDS Hub stands ready to support ABAS implementation.

The UN OFFICE FOR PROJECT SERVICES (UNOPS) announced a forthcoming memorandum of understanding with SIDS to provide project implementation services, and supported the adoption of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI), as did the STOCKHOLM ENVIRONMENT INSTITUTE.

The WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME reaffirmed its commitment to help SIDS governments adapt to climate change and prepare for disaster response.

The WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION highlighted the importance to SIDS of its Aid for Trade initiative and the 2022 WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies.

The UN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT FUND (UNCDF) highlighted UNCDF's role in The Global Fund for Coral Reefs and "crowding in" public and private financing for SIDS priorities.

UNICEF highlighted the SIDS Global Children & Youth Action Summit held 24-26 May 2024 and expressed full support for the priorities and proposed actions in its Call to Action.

The SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMMUNITY MAJOR GROUP welcomed the establishment of a SIDS Global Data Hub and urged actions to strengthen scientific institutions in SIDS.

The PACIFIC DISABILITY FORUM said ABAS cannot be fully realized without accounting for disabilities. He called for: incorporating disability design in all interventions; and all governments to provide disability-disaggregated data.

The CARIBBEAN NATURAL RESOURCES INSTITUTE underscored: optimizing civil society's contributions through mutually beneficial partnerships; promoting locally owned environmental and social enterprises; and incorporating environmental, social, climate, and gender justice at all levels of governance. The PACIFIC ISLANDS ASSOCIATION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS echoed the call for inclusive partnerships that go beyond token consultations and ensure participatory, multisectoral approaches in policy and budget decisions.

The INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME ON THE STATE OF THE OCEAN and the HIGH SEAS ALLIANCE said the BBNJ treaty offers opportunities to forge more meaningful partnerships with community-based organizations, Indigenous Peoples, and other stakeholders.

The INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (IIED) highlighted the Global SIDS Debt Sustainability Support Service IIED had developed, in partnership with Antigua and Barbuda, and the Maldives, to protect SIDS from the economic fallout of climate impacts, spur community level finance, and implement debt relief measures.

The OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE called for a major global evidence-gathering and stocktaking effort to build the knowledge architecture necessary to implement the ABAS.

The INTEGRATED HEALTH OUTREACH drew attention to those most vulnerable and urged the adoption of strong anti-violence and anti-discrimination policies.

The FOUNDATION FOR DEVELOPMENT PLANNING said that any consideration of sustainability must address the extractive character of many economic strategies.

The UN OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS outlined its emergency assistance programs and demanded that humanitarian support be complemented by long-term financial commitments.

The GREEN CLIMATE FUND (GCF) committed to streamlining internal processes to simplify access to climate finance and prioritize building long-term partnerships over single transactions and projects.

### ***Interactive Dialogue on Making Climate Finance Work for SIDS: Building on the Outcomes of the UNFCCC COP 28***

Dialogue Co-Chair Surangel Whipps Jr., President, Palau, said the meeting should discuss how to move climate finance from rhetoric to action. Co-Chair Jennifer Morgan, State Secretary and Special Envoy for International Climate Action, Germany,

suggested discussing what is needed to increase climate finance for SIDS to levels needed.

**Fireside Chat:** Simona Marinescu, UNOPS, moderated. Naadir Nigel Hamid Hassan, Minister for Finance, Economic Planning and Trade, Seychelles, agreed that actions have not been in line with the rhetoric. He urged swiftly adopting and implementing the MVI, opening concessional finance to SIDS, and streamlining access processes.

Tomas Anker Christensen, State Secretary and Special Envoy for Climate, Denmark, referenced the new [OECD report](#) showing that in 2022 developed countries provided and mobilized USD 115.9 billion in climate finance for developing countries. He said that the Loss and Damage Fund should be operationalized and ready for business by COP 29 (2024), and it appears that funding for adaptation will double by 2025. Christensen agreed the current international financial architecture is not fit for purpose.

**Panel:** Mafalda Duarte, Executive Director, GCF, proposed establishing a new task force within the GCF to simplify access and highlighted her institution's collaborations with national governments.

Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary, UNFCCC, said that the next two COPs would be essential in demonstrating that "the Paris Agreement is working." He also welcomed that the USD 100 billion climate finance goal has been reached in 2022 and urged countries to start afresh in the negotiations over a New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on Climate Finance.

**Statements:** MARSHALL ISLANDS drew attention to the importance of advancing negotiations on the decarbonization of the shipping industry. MALDIVES said the NCQG should keep the needs of the developing world at its core. ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES shared experiences in leveraging climate finance to update NAPs. The UK noted a lack of discussion on blue finance. GUYANA showcased its efforts in using climate finance to conserve forests, noting they are not adequately valued by the global financial system.

TANZANIA called for a dedicated fund specifically geared to support SIDS in building climate resilience. BAHAMAS said funds to make the Loss and Damage Fund operational are only a start; significant capitalization is needed. MOROCCO called for increasing climate finance earmarked for SIDS and providing more innovative forms of financing.

PORTUGAL expressed support for the "finance compact for SIDS" concept. SWEDEN asked SIDS to identify main gaps and needs to realize the UAE Consensus and how donors like Sweden could best help address them. He also welcomed the World Bank's climate resilience debt clause. The UNITED ARAB EMIRATES welcomed the climate resilience debt clause and the proposal for the Global SIDS Debt Sustainability Support Service.

MAURITIUS called for all funding institutions to create a SIDS-dedicated window. AUSTRALIA suggested looking for opportunities to aggregate financing at the regional or project level. NAURU said the Loss and Damage Fund should have broad eligibility criteria, be easily accessible, and adopt the MVI. MONTSERRAT advocated addressing the fund accessibility of UN associate members.

The INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES expressed concern over the lack of early warning systems in many SIDS. UNEP said that integrated nature-based solutions should feature more prominently in financial streams. The WORLD BANK listed her institution's diverse efforts to provide accessible funds to SIDS.

UNCDF stressed the importance of accessible insurance programs and cash relief after disaster events. The INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION called for increased funding to deal with climate displacement within SIDS.

The UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA mentioned tailored programs to train stakeholders in requesting funds from the GCF and other institutions.

ADOPTACOSTLINE called for climate finance to be directed to coastal ecosystems such as coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass, which protect local populations against disasters and preserve biodiversity. The OCEAN RISK AND RESILIENCE ACTION ALLIANCE noted that Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) on Life Below Water is the least funded.

### *Interactive Dialogue on Leveraging Data and Digital Technologies and Building Effective Institutions for a Resilient Future in SIDS*

Dialogue Co-Chairs Penelope Beckles-Robinson, Minister of Planning and Development, Trinidad and Tobago, and Dace Melbārde, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Latvia, underscored that data and digital technologies can help deliver resilient prosperity under ABAS, from disaster risk reduction to improved public services in healthcare, agriculture, food, tourism, and the blue economy.

**Fireside Chat:** Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Executive Director, ITC, moderated the fireside chat with Minna-Liina Lind, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Estonia, and Carlos James, Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Sustainable Development and Culture, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Lind noted similarities between Estonia in the early 1990s and SIDS, when Estonia had nothing and decided to leapfrog to digital, resulting in long-term savings. She said enabling legal frameworks, public-private partnerships, cybersecurity, and human-centered digital solutions are crucial to success.

On capacity constraints SIDS continue to face, James highlighted scale and high infrastructure cost as key issues, both of which could be addressed through an integrated regional approach. Lind advocated for full use of existing mechanisms rather than inventing new ones and emphasized international cooperation, saying the UN can help with data harnessing.

On how the UN can be responsive to SIDS' needs, James said providing support for data collection and mining to help develop responsive policies—and funding these—are paramount.

**Panel:** Carla Natalie Barnett, Secretary-General, CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM) said Caribbean SIDS face challenges of scale, scope, costs, technology availability, and bandwidth to overcome and "we know we can't do it alone."

Vidar Helgesen, Executive Secretary, INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION (IOC/UNESCO), focused on oceans data, underscoring its importance for SIDS and the many challenges SIDS face in harnessing it. He provided successful examples involving SIDS

such as the [Ocean Infohub](#) and [Pacific Islands Marine Bioinvasion Alert Network](#). He recommended: building strong and durable connections across ocean science communities; investing in people and institutions; and investing in oceans observation.

**Statements:** Many statements emphasized the importance of concluding the negotiations on the UN [Global Digital Compact](#) and welcomed the SIDS Global Data Hub. Several countries shared their experiences harnessing data and digital technologies to improve resilience, including:

- JAMAICA's ICT Action Plan and National Broadband Initiative, teacher training, use of geospatial tools, and work on a new data protection law;
- ROMANIA's open data platform for monitoring the country's implementation of the SDGs;
- KIRIBATI's national programs to develop digital infrastructure, including a one-stop-shop national portal for government services;
- IRELAND's fellowship and exchange programs on remote sensing and artificial intelligence (AI) to build coastal resilience and support accurate policymaking for oceans;
- TÜRKIYE's e-government gateway providing over 8,000 services to citizens;
- PAPUA NEW GUINEA's Digital Act 2023 to digitize government information management;
- INDIA's bilateral development partnerships like providing over 1,000 information technology training opportunities for Pacific SIDS.

BOTSWANA said it had decided to develop homegrown solutions to digitalization and urged SIDS to do likewise.

TUVALU stressed the importance of fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships to leverage digital technologies and invest in digital proficiency. SINGAPORE urged focusing on building trust in data systems through developing a comprehensive framework of standards and safeguards, and on international cooperation on digitalization. ZIMBABWE welcomed the UN's Early Warning for All Initiative.

POLAND underscored the importance of:

- high-quality institutions;
- digital solutions to reduce inequalities;
- education and training; and
- supporting societal resilience by combatting disinformation and cyberviolence.

INDONESIA emphasized identifying levers to close data and digital divides and investing in digital talent through initiatives like the [AIS Blue Hub](#). BELGIUM said it allocated EUR 6.68 million for a systematic observation financing facility to support those most in need to reduce climate-induced catastrophes.

Other interventions highlighted:

- the need to fully operationalize the SIDS Center of Excellence to address data gaps;
- the need for data and digital technologies in disaster risk assessment, early warning systems, and building back better post-disaster, all of which require greater regional integration and South-South cooperation;

- using data to develop tailored local agricultural and food systems policies;
- using satellite imagery analysis beyond DRR; and
- leveraging digital and health informatics to address social determinants of health.

### **Special Event: Civil Society Forum**

This informal special event, moderated by Dessima Williams, President, Parliament, Grenada, highlighted civil society's contributions towards SIDS' sustainable development. Opening remarks were made by UN institutions, SIDS governments, and civil society organizations. The first panel launched the SIDS Civil Society Roadmap and Action Plan outlining how civil society can support the inclusive implementation of ABAS. The second panel sought to promote partnerships among civil society and financial and state institutions. Before closing, interventions by local creatives showcased the artistic and cultural richness of SIDS communities.

### **In the Corridors**

The third day of the Conference highlighted civil society and local community perspectives and experiences, both in the general debate and at a civil society forum event. Dissatisfaction with both the substance of the outcome document (ABAS), and the negotiation process was apparent. One representative put it diplomatically, saying, "The untapped potential of SIDS civil society is not reflected in the text."

Others were less inclined to hold back, bemoaning the few opportunities offered for local community organizations to participate in the negotiation of ABAS. "No one seems to be listening to us, although we are the lifeblood of SIDS." More than one observer complained about the shrinking spaces for civil society in many SIDS countries.

It was not only rifts between civil society and their governments that became apparent at the margins of the debate, but also divergences between different SIDS on divisive issues such as deep-sea mining and decarbonization of the shipping sector. These issues, which are currently discussed under the auspices of the International Seabed Authority and the International Maritime Organization, respectively, cast a shadow on the ostensible harmony and unity of SIDS.

With air conditioning sporadically on strike in some locations, developed countries and international financial institutions increasingly felt the heat, too. An OECD report published in the morning brought welcome news that the USD 100 billion climate finance goal had been met and exceeded in 2022, but SIDS made clear that that money remains too difficult to access and woefully insufficient. Looking forward to the negotiations for a New Collective and Quantified Goal on Climate Finance under the UNFCCC, one delegate was visibly relieved by the opportunity to "finally leave the toxic number 100 billion behind and start afresh."

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of SIDS4 will be available on Monday, 3 June 2024, at [bit.ly/SIDS4ENB](https://bit.ly/SIDS4ENB).