



SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Statement

By

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Addressing Climate Change: The United Nations and the World at Work

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

St. Vincent and the Grenadines associates itself fully with the statements made by Barbados on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM); by Grenada on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS); and by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. President,

The adoption of the Bali Roadmap two months ago is a welcome, if modest, step in our continued struggle for global climate security. However, the true worth of the Roadmap will not be measured in self-congratulatory statements this week, but in the work of Member States and our genuine commitment to the Bali Action Plan in the immediate future. The United Nations process has adequately framed the issues and charted the way forward. Now it is time for the world to work towards concrete implementation of both the spirit and the letter of the Roadmap.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines accepts the scientific evidence that demonstrates a causal relationship between climate change and the levels of greenhouse gas emissions emanating primarily from developed countries. As such, we recognize the crucial importance of developed countries radically cutting their emissions. We have every confidence that, as responsible global citizens, they will work in good faith towards meaningful reductions in the coming years.

But the importance of future emissions reductions cannot overshadow the fact that, for St. Vincent and the Grenadines and many other nations, climate change is not an esoteric theoretical concept looming on a distant hypothetical horizon. It is already a stark reality and gathering threat. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, citizens are being displaced by increasingly intense storms and tidal surges today. Residents are slowly losing their costal property to rising and encroaching seas today. The government is investing heavily in costal fortifications today. Our undersea environment is suffering from reef death and coral bleaching today. And our Farming, Fishing and Tourism sectors are being adversely affected today. The immediacy of these issues

means that we cannot wait for 2012 and beyond for incremental relief from the lifestyle excesses of others. We need to address these problems today.

In that regard, the twin issues of adaptation and financing are of urgent importance to St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Adaptation financing, in particular, cannot simply be an awkward appendage to mitigation efforts. It is insufficient to merely pay lip service to the importance of adaptation while dooming adaptation initiatives to failure with inadequate funding or support. If climate change is indeed the “defining human development challenge of the 21st century,” as stated in Bali by the president of the UN Climate Change Conference, we cannot delude ourselves into thinking that this challenge can be addressed on the cheap. It shall quickly become apparent to the international community that the recently launched Adaptation Fund, though welcome, is nonetheless severely undercapitalized and will be unable to cope with even modest adaptation needs unless it is buttressed by substantial voluntary contributions from developed countries.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines therefore sees ample scope for innovative regional approaches to adaptation and opportunities for fresh partnerships in capacity building. We also welcome efforts to deepen South-South cooperation on a broad range of environmental issues, such as the energy-saving light bulb initiative selflessly advanced by Cuba, which has reduced the carbon footprint – and electricity bill – of almost every residence in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Additionally, it is necessary to fundamentally review the debt obligations of developing countries through the prism of climate change. Many of us are still paying for infrastructural investments that are no longer viable, or whose effective lifespan will be severely curtailed by climate change. Many of us will have to borrow more to retrofit previous investments, which were often funded, designed and built by foreign lenders. It is illogical and immoral that we continue to pay developed creditor states for items whose very use is compromised by their actions.

The gravity of the climate change challenge also forces us to abandon longstanding proprietary paradigms of technological exclusivity. The world cannot sacrifice its collective climate security on the altar of private profit or parochial concepts of Intellectual Property. If climate change is a

global problem, so too must the solutions belong to the entire planet. The developed world and the scientific community must find ways to quickly and freely place emerging green technologies and capabilities into the hands of those who need them most urgently. Measurable, reportable and verifiable cooperation in the fields of technology, capacity-building and financing are not charity. They are shrewd investments against future global catastrophes.

Mr. President,

It is crucial that the challenge of climate change is not simply viewed as an environmental issue, but as a crosscutting developmental concern. For some states, coping with climate change may not only represent an added expense, but may also require a complete readjustment of developmental priorities.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines, for example, has been effectively globalized out of reliance on agriculture as the dominant engine for national growth and development. Now the threat is that we may be climatized out of similar reliance on tourism. We are making multi-million dollar investments in leveraging our sunny climate, calm seas, pristine beaches, coral reefs and diverse marine life to lure tourists. Climate change threatens to deprive us of these few marketable natural assets.

Further, the profound developmental implications of climate change must necessarily trigger a fundamental reexamination of the international community's approach to developmental assistance. Development commitments made in the past – before the impact of climate change was fully understood – must now be reconsidered. And those of us in the developing world must clearly consider the developmental impact of not only climate change, but also the measures being employed to address it. For example, the rush to biofuel production will barely dent the developed world's appetite for fossil fuels, but has already made basic foodstuffs noticeably more expensive in many developing states. We cannot allow ourselves to be negatively affected by both climate change and its proposed solutions.

Mr. President,

While St. Vincent and the Grenadines is fully cognizant of the critical importance of steady and efficient procedural progress in coordinating the global effort against climate change, we in the United Nations cannot become so enamored with the *process* that we lose sight of the *substance* of our mission. There is an old joke in the medical profession whose punchline is: “the operation was a success, but the patient has died.” Amidst the shuffle of expert groups, working groups and a proliferation of new abbreviations and acronyms, we must never forget that our patient is the planet earth, and the survival of the entire planet is our collective responsibility. We cannot afford to fail.

I thank you.