

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE MAURITIUS INTERNATIONAL MEETING

The “special case of SIDS” arises from the challenges small islands face as a result of their size, remoteness, and economic and environmental vulnerabilities. However, with varying degrees of economic development and physical vulnerabilities, SIDS continue to struggle to attract the international support they consider necessary for their sustainable development. This can be attributed, in part, to the changing focus of the international agenda since the Barbados Conference in 1994, which is increasingly focused on security concerns, the implementation of the MDGs, and the prioritization of domestic good governance over governance reforms at the international level. Given this changing climate, the IM was seen by many as an opportunity to revitalize international support for the SIDS cause and to realign the BPOA – the blueprint for the sustainable development of SIDS – to the evolving international agenda, including the need to address new and emerging issues such as the impacts of trade liberalization and globalization, information and communication technologies, and health and HIV/AIDS. With this in mind, there were benefits of holding the IM: reprioritize and increase the global political profile of SIDS issues, and attract new impetus from SIDS development partners, including a commitment to financing, in the context of declining ODA flows to SIDS. However, there were potential dangers in having a review process, such as subjecting the BPOA to renegotiation and the weakening of international commitments taken in 1994.

This brief analysis reviews how the IM addressed these and other issues, examining challenges faced at the meeting, focusing on climate change, trade and nuclear shipments, and the steps forward for implementation of its outcomes.

COMPETING AGENDAS

IM President Bérenger characterized the meeting as one taking place in the context of the painful aftermath of the tsunami and much frustration accumulated among SIDS due to “10 wasted years” with regard to BPOA implementation. Bérenger would describe the review as the opening of a historical window of opportunity, always in “danger of banging shut.”

One of the greatest challenges faced by SIDS during the review process was their struggle to maintain control of the agenda. In Nassau, the AOSIS Strategy document was drafted to highlight the priorities identified by SIDS for improving the BPOA’s implementation and identify new and emerging issues to be addressed. In March 2004, the AOSIS Strategy was endorsed by the G-77/China as the basis for negotiations at the April Preparatory Meeting in New York. However, SIDS’ donor partners found the Strategy document impractical, citing concerns regarding: the overt direction to the international community on what it needed to do with regards to BPOA implementation, and a conspicuous lack of commitments by SIDS for their own sustainable development; unpalatable demands for a special category for SIDS within both the UN and the WTO; and the inadequate integration with the MDGs as a lack of recognition of the new development mantra. This was compounded by the uncertainty of criteria for SIDS among different UN entities, which have different interpretations and lists of SIDS. Some delegates suggested that the negotiating text was too aspirational, missing an opportunity to result in action-oriented outcomes. Given these different perceptions of the review, the threat of the IM’s outcome resulting in a lowest common denominator using text from the Monterrey Consensus and the JPOI, instead of defining a new SIDS-based vision for implementation, hung over the negotiations, like a storm cloud waiting to burst.

The issue of climate change proved to be a particularly hot topic at the IM. Addressing this issue was the primary reason for the formation of AOSIS and was highlighted as a priority in Nassau, resulting in pride of place being given to it in the first chapter of the Strategy document. However, at the IM, matters became difficult. Possible tactics during the preparatory process to delay discussions until after the US elections failed in their intent, while growing concern by some developing countries over the idea of new commitments for them in the Kyoto Protocol's second commitment period soured enthusiasm for revolutionary text.

In contrast to this, AOSIS forcefully called for action in its Buenos Aires AOSIS Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change, issued at UNFCCC COP-10 in December, and reaffirmed its position in its Ministerial Communiqué at the fifth AOSIS Summit held in parallel to the IM on Wednesday. Some even suggested that the heated discussions in Buenos Aires were a strategic blunder on the side of AOSIS, serving only to provide a warning to laggard countries that the IM could prompt future action on climate change by all countries, something which has proved elusive in the UNFCCC COP. One group of countries was alarmed to realize that text on energy, which was agreed at the Preparatory Meeting in New York, did not include reference to the promotion of fossil fuel technologies and strove diligently for its inclusion in the text. Not surprisingly, many seasoned climate negotiators, from both sides, turned up in Mauritius. These concerns led to a continuation of the intensity of discussions at COP-10, with some delegates dubbing the IM's contact group on climate change as "COP-10*bis*." As a result, the climate text was the last section of the Mauritius Strategy to be agreed, and only after delegates concluded with an all-night negotiating session. But climate discussions did not end with the Main Committee and surfaced once again, when the host country tabled the draft political declaration. Although this was subsequently amended, the issue of climate change did not even appear in the initially circulated draft of the Mauritius Political Declaration.

Trade was another issue that held the potential to create acrimonious divisions between the SIDS and their development partners. During the October round of informal informals in New York, delegates stared each other down over SIDS' insistence on directing the Doha Development Agenda negotiations in the WTO. Despite efforts by SIDS in the pre-Doha negotiations to secure agreement for special and preferential treatment, which they argued, must result in their recognition as a new category of countries in the WTO, the Doha Ministerial Declaration contains precise language opposing a new category for SIDS. Some SIDS saw the IM as an opportunity to re-open this debate. During the IM, the main architects of the Doha Agenda – the US and EU – vehemently opposed the trade language and questioned the validity of a UN process directing or prejudging the WTO negotiations. As anticipated this text also drew the attention of several of the developing countries' big guns of the trade negotiations, who were also not favorable to the SIDS position. The Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) nations' recent endorsement of the Mauritius Minister for Foreign Affairs as a candidate for the post of WTO Director-General, also had the potential to further complicate matters. Following two days of informal discussions, agreement on trade came without any hemorrhaging, and delegates emerged with a consensus text that does not provide for a new SIDS category, but contains meaningful references to support the special case of SIDS by prioritizing efforts to integrate them fully into the multilateral trading system, including measures to ensure they can harness the benefits from globalization and trade liberalization.

The inclusion of liability issues regarding the transboundary movement of hazardous waste, World War II shipwrecks, and transportation of radioactive

material was another highly contentious point in the negotiations. While some observers were expecting differences among the SIDS regions to lead to visible divisions, the discussions on these issues highlighted the solidarity among the SIDS regions. While issues of WWII shipwrecks were a clear priority for the Pacific SIDS, and transportation issues more specific to Caribbean SIDS, the two regions formed a solid front, stressing the "greatest importance" attached by *all* SIDS to the need for liability on these issues. On the transboundary movement of hazardous waste, although the reference to liability was deleted based on a suggestion by the US, this may not be of critical importance to SIDS if the Liability Protocol to the Basel Convention enters into force. The paragraph on sunken vessels remained in the Strategy, but due to Japan's opposition, it was considerably watered down. SIDS earned a twofold victory on the transport of radioactive materials, notwithstanding fierce opposition from Japan and the US, there is recognition by the international community of the cessation of such transport in SIDS region as the "ultimate desired goal" for SIDS; and, despite the EU's reluctance, the agreed text includes a reference to the further development and strengthening of international regulatory regimes, *inter alia*, in relation to the transport of radioactive materials.

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

While attention focused on climate, trade and waste, other significant negotiations took place. One of these was the efforts by the EU to ensure the overall alignment of text to the priorities of the international development agenda. This is not surprising since the EU has already aligned its development cooperation priorities to support the achievement of the MDGs. However, in stark contrast to the difference between the EU and SIDS over the trade text, the two groups shared a common agenda, joining together to ensure the increased impetus in the Mauritius Strategy to prioritize support for resilience building and vulnerability projects, adding social and economic development considerations to the BPOA and making it considerably more attractive to donors. Supporting this recognition, UNDP – the UN's lead agency for the implementation of the MDGs – launched a SIDS Resilience Building Facility to assist SIDS to develop the capacity to formulate and implement initiatives to reduce their vulnerabilities.

Another area where the IM achieved a significant outcome, and one which is clearly unique in recent international meetings, was the direction it gave to the UN Secretary-General. While most recent UN summits and conferences broadly reference the role of the UN system in follow-up activities, the IM took a great leap forward, providing specific guidance to the UN Secretary-General to champion and mainstream the SIDS case from the top down.

THE MAURITIUS LEGACY

In his closing address, IM Secretary-General Chowdhury presented a "roadmap" for the implementation of the IM's outcomes, which will attempt to place the SIDS agenda on the broader international arena, including at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, UN General Assembly, thirteenth session of the Commission of Sustainable Development, UNDP Executive Board, South Summit, UN major event, and the WTO Ministerial Conference.

The question that comes to the mind of many delegates is whether the Mauritius Strategy will make a difference. On the one hand, there is little doubt that the IM strengthened partnerships, increased SIDS' ownership of responsibility over their sustainable development, renewed and/or reprioritized international community support, improved SIDS-SIDS and South-South cooperation, increased UN

specialized agency engagement in SIDS issues, and identified new means of implementation, including through the launching of the SIDS University Consortium. On the other hand, some might criticize the IM's outcomes, noting that the text does not provide clear direction to other international organizations and processes, such as the international financial institutions and multilateral environmental agreements, and that there were almost no commitments for new and additional financing or projects at the meeting apart from addressing vulnerability to disasters, such as tsunamis.

In the words of the UN Secretary-General, the building of a solid text that commands broad acceptance, based on which the BPOA may be properly implemented, was key. From the perspective of moving forward on implementation, the IM raised the profile of SIDS issues, brought the BPOA in line with current development funding priorities, and forged links with the review of the Millennium Declaration and with the Doha round of trade negotiations. Despite the diversity of views on the IM's outcomes, the success of the meeting will ultimately depend on how the Mauritius Strategy is implemented by SIDS and their donor partners and integrated into the global development agenda in general.