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WHAT NEXT FOR THE ALLIANCE OF SMALL ISLAND STATES IN THE CLIMATE CHANGE ARENA?

by Daniel Brindis*

Small Island States (“SIS”) fight a high stakes uphill battle in advocating their interests in climate change treaty negotiation. This class of 43 nations represents only five percent of the world’s population, a miniscule portion of the world’s gross domestic product, and is the most vulnerable class of states to global climate change.¹ The isolation of these states and their limited capacity to adapt to natural disasters stand to aggravate the harmful effects of climate change.²


SIS suffer from changing weather patterns, and scientists predict that some island nations stand to lose substantial portions of land due to sea level rise.³ Losing this land threatens these islands’ development efforts as natural resources on the islands become sparse.⁴ Island tourism, a major source for investment in many of these States, also suffers due to shrinking resources and unpredictable changing weather patterns.⁵ In recognition of the common threat and vulnerabilities of the SIS, the Alliance of Small Island States (“AOSIS”) was born.⁶

In 1994, members of AOSIS met in Barbados and formulated a strategy to confront climate change, improve SIS adaptability to climate change, and make SIS development more sustainable.⁷ In 2004, the impacts of the devastating tsunami underlined the vulnerability of these island nations. Motivated by this environmental catastrophe, the AOSIS drafted the Mauritius declaration, a pro-active policy strategy declaration that outlines the SIS struggle to exist in the face of the threat of climate change. These nations, gathering at the UN Conference on Small Islands in 2005, adopted the Mauritius Declaration and reaffirmed and expanded the Barbados Programme of Action.⁸

Additionally, the Kyoto Protocol and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change represented lightning rods of participation and cooperation among SIS to encourage the reduction of greenhouse gas (“GHG”) emissions.⁹ As a result, participation in these meetings represented a positive initial step in cooperation among the SIS.¹⁰ The synergy of SIS gave the states more representation, resulting in SIS gaining concessions to provide for financial aid and resources to help the developing island nations adapt to climate change.¹¹

The cooperation of such isolated States is an encouraging example of how vulnerable parties with aligned interests can represent themselves with a force that outweighs the sum of its parts. The expansion and broadening of this alliance for cooperation beyond SIS themselves could strengthen its force. AOSIS and non-governmental organizations working on behalf of SIS should focus efforts of alliances beyond climate change vulnerable states to also work with vulnerable populations and coastal lowland communities in industrialized nations that are resistant to the GHG reduction. Although St. Lucia, for instance, and the United States have different goals and interests at the Kyoto Protocol negotiation table, this small island nation has its interests well aligned with areas such as Louisiana or Massachusetts, areas that are particularly sensitive to rising sea levels. Groups like the Climate Institute in Washington, D.C. have begun to plan

such efforts through their Endangered Islands Campaign.¹² This campaign proposes various partnership programs between SIS and low coastal cities in larger countries, one example being “[w]orking with the International Hurricane Research Center in Miami to ensure that state of the art techniques for storm surge and wind resistance planning in South Florida are adapted for use in [SIS].”¹³

Much is left to be desired in terms of having an international climate change policy that can protect the citizens of SIS from rising sea levels and increasingly unpredictable and extreme weather patterns. By broadening the links between all vulnerable areas of the world at sub-state levels, SIS can raise awareness of their vulnerability and lobby for the major GHG producers to curb their emissions. The coming decades present potential grave consequences for SIS and the major GHG producers have a moral duty to the front line victims of climate change. 

The isolation of these states and their limited capacity to adapt to natural disasters stand to aggravate the harmful effects of climate change.

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ENDNOTES: WHAT NEXT FOR THE ALLIANCE

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¹ See About AOSIS, Alliance Of Small Island States website, <http://www.sidsnet.org/aosis/> (last visited Feb. 11, 2007).

² See About AOSIS, *id.*

³ See Alexander Gillespie, *Small Island States in the Face of Climatic Change: The End of the Line in International Environmental Responsibility*, 22 UCLA J. ENVTL. L. & POL'Y 107, 113-14 (2004).

⁴ See EMMA L. TOMPKINS et al., SURVIVING CLIMATE CHANGE IN SMALL ISLANDS — A GUIDEBOOK 11 (Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research 2005).

⁵ See TOMPKINS et. al., *id.*

⁶ See W. Jackson Davis, The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS): The International Conscience, ASIA-PACIFIC MAG., May 1996, available at <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/APM/TXT/davis-j-02-96.html> (last visited Feb. 11, 2007).

⁷ World Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Apr. 25–May 6, 1994, *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States*, U.N. Doc. A/CONF.167/9 (Oct. 1994), available at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf167/aconf167-9.htm> (last visited Feb. 11, 2007).

⁸ United Nations Website, Mauritius Conference Highlights, <http://www.un.org/smallislands2005/> (last visited Feb. 11, 2007).

⁹ See Davis, *supra* note 6.

¹⁰ See Davis, *supra* note 6.

¹¹ See Gillespie, *supra* note 3, at 121 (offering an overview of the climate change aid programs that give SIS priority).

¹² See Climate.org, Endangered Islands Campaign Begins to Gather Momentum as Mauritius Conference Approaches, <http://www.climate.org/programs/endangered-islands.shtml> (last visited Feb. 11, 2007).

¹³ See Climate.org, *id.*
