

Signing of the Alliance of Small Island Developing States (AOSIS) Sustainable Energy Partnership Mechanism

Remarks President Robert B. Zoellick
Press Conference
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Opening Statement

AMBASSADOR DESSIMA WILLIAMS: ... Of course partnerships are the name of the game now, so I want to welcome to the podium the President of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick. And as he approaches, I also thank his team for their preparation, thank you.

MR. ZOELICK: Thank you very much Ambassador Williams [Inaudible]--but I see that you're moving us all very effectively through this, so I want to thank you for your efforts. And Prime Minister Thomas is an important leader, my colleague Helen Clark [ph] from UNDP. But I have to have a special word of thanks for Dr. Lykke Friis. Denmark has provided generous support, without which we really wouldn't be able to launch this. But in addition, as you got the sense, Denmark is a policy innovator. As Dr. Friis mentioned, part of this maybe comes from Denmark's experience as an island state itself. But she didn't mention the fact that there's another connection here, which is that if you go to Copenhagen along the dock area, there's a beautiful warehouse that has murals of the old ties that Denmark had with the Caribbean, going back 200 years. So Denmark itself had experience with being a Caribbean state for a while.

I think it's important, one of the lessons we learned out of Copenhagen was there's obviously some very large countries doing and playing an important role in dealing with climate change. But we really have to go build a broad coalition. And in this case the small island states really have been the leaders on the climate agenda for over two decades. It was the Maldives that was one of the first countries to draw attention to the risk of rising sea levels.

Barbados and Mauritius played leadership roles in developing the Barbados Program of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation.

Antigua and Barbuda, along with Jamaica, are currently playing lead roles with the Ad hoc Working Group for the Kyoto Protocol and Clean Development Mechanism.

I had a chance to meet the Prime Minister when we were in Grenada, and I had a sense that this is something he's coming out with, I mean when we were in Copenhagen, that's something that we needed to put more effort in. I had a chance then to go down to the Caribbean, to meet with the CARICOM colleagues and I think some of this work is an example of something that I think we'll deal--we'll get a better sense of out of Cancun, which is that while we work going at the treaty level, we don't have to wait. These are important building blocks, and we can learn, we can develop pilots, there's been--a critical need is to learn how to scale up along the way. And I think one of the reasons why AOSIS is such a good partner is these countries are not waiting. These are very practical steps that we're taking across a variety of areas.

At the Bank, the island states have been some of the first that we've developed a multi-sovereign catastrophic risk insurance product with. We support something called the Caribbean Catastrophic Risk Insurance Facility, which provides immediate financial liquidity when various parameters are triggered because of wind or hurricanes.

Islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific are mainstreaming adaptation and disaster risk management into their core development planning. We've been able to work with our colleagues at other regional development banks to have a Pilot Program for Climate Resilience to help them with these efforts.

Many island states have already taken the lead in developing their own low-carbon strategies. The Maldives was one of the very first countries to announce a plan to become carbon neutral within ten years.

Barbados is a leader in developing solar water heaters and providing technical assistance to others based on its experience.

The Marshall Islands are proposing a low-carbon agreement among a small group of island states.

So we at the Bank feel that these are exceptionally good partners, to try to not only help them but to demonstrate a larger example so we can then apply this to another occasion.

Natural disasters hit small island states with significant economic losses. For example, in the case of Grenada, Hurricane Ivan had damages worth 200 percent of GDP in 2004. So we're trying to work with countries to integrate the climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction into overall economic growth programs.

The pilot programs that we're working on with climate resilience includes investment pilots in six Caribbean and three Pacific Islands, also in coordinating one regional component focused on scientific data collection, monitoring, and capacity building, and each of these programs includes about \$60 to \$75 million in grants.

Right now we're supporting Grenada, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in reducing vulnerability to weather hazards.

In the Pacific, the Bank, with the support of the GEF, has been working with Kiribati on trying to mainstream climate adaptation in development plans and investments, and we have similar operations in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

Through IDA, which is the fund that we have for overall development for the 79 poorest countries and through a Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, we finance disaster risk management for coastal infrastructure in Samoa and Tonga, as well as capacity building in nine Pacific island countries.

We also with specific Pacific Catastrophic Risk Assessment Financing to try to provide the Pacific Islands with disaster risk assessment tools and options.

Now, this program is obviously a key element because there's, as Dr. Park [ph.] said, these are countries that not only get hit by climate change and rising sea levels but they pay an extra price in terms of energy costs. So if we can get energy efficiency, develop alternative energy sources, we have multiple benefits.

What we need to do is take the experience here and draw regional interconnections that offer some broader support to electricity sectors, particularly in hurricane-stricken archipelagos.

So the Clean Technology Fund that we've developed as part of our Climate Investment Fund packages has the benefit of being able to leverage some of these investments up to eight times or more and, frankly, we then develop valuable experience as we go.

So we're very proud to have a partnership with AOSIS. AOSIS has been a leader, that if we're going to deal with climate change more generally, whether it's island states, mountain states, others, we've got to bring everybody to the coalition, and so we're very appreciative particularly of UNDP and Denmark in helping us get this catalytic piece forward.

Thank you.