



**CIPRIANI COLLEGE**  
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

# **WORK MATTERS**

## **COLUMN**

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# SIDS 2024: ARE WE THERE YET?

On April 26, 2024, an evening of commemoration was held at the Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Centre in Barbados to celebrate essentially two events. The first was the thirtieth anniversary of the Barbados Program of Action (BPOA) for Small Island Developing States and secondly, to honour the memory and contribution of the late Miles Stoby, former Guyanese Ambassador, and the United Nations Coordinator of the BPOA Conference in 1994 in Barbados.

The retelling of the events and challenges which led to the staging of an international conference in a small state and the elaboration of the policy document were interesting. This aspect of the evening was well done through a panel discussion which included several key actors from the Barbados Foreign Service, Senator Elizabeth Thompson, and the Deputy United Nations Coordinator of the Conference, Ambassador Christopher Hackett.

In the wake of the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) which will be held in St John's, Antigua and Barbuda to review the progress made under the BPOA it was timely and instructive to revisit parts of that journey. The overarching theme of the conference in Antigua and Barbuda is "Charting the course toward resilient prosperity". It is relevant to point out that earlier reviews of the BPOA have not been positive and did not significantly advance the interests of SIDS. It is not unusual in human history to forget a difficult past or to recall that past in a way that mutes their intensity at the time. For some of us who were around before the BPOA this was a difficult time for the recognition of SIDS and a time in which we had to shout to have our voices heard. Small was not beautiful and small was often left out or ignored.

A challenge was that given the workings of the General Assembly, the resolutions were presented in blocks from various groups. The resolutions on SIDS were presented to the Committee by the Group of 77 (Developing Countries). There was always a difficulty, depending on the leadership, to have the resolution

included and negotiated as one of the Group of 77. Those of us that have worked at the multilateral level are painfully aware that once countries merge into their regional grouping at the international level their allegiances shift and the assurances and supports that are echoed at the local and bilateral level evaporate. To return to the discussion in the Second Committee, it was evident, at that time, that Small Islands States and their issues and challenges were not a priority. Another reality was that, at the time, not all the small islands states in the United Nations were enthusiastic about the issue. In the Committee it was sometimes difficult to have the full participation of the African Islands and at times, regrettably, the islands of the Pacific. It is noteworthy to point out that countries like Singapore and Malta were vocal and presented quality inputs. Malta, before that country joined the European Union was an excellent and enthusiastic partner. In short "the heavy lifting" was left to the Caribbean delegations.

Since the BPOA and the formation of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) there has been greater and wider collaboration and a platform and mechanism on which to approach the international community. Prior to 1994, where Developed Countries viewed SIDS only through the prism of GNP per Capita, several SIDS were "graduated" from United Nations technical assistance on this basis. SIDS have since developed new mechanisms and tools that attempt to give a more realistic picture of their situation. The reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have made the case repeatedly that climate change driven impacts and risks are amplified for small islands. Small Islands are therefore on the frontline of the climate challenge and the experience of the Caribbean in recent years with major hurricanes, storms, and other natural disasters have borne out that fact. GNP per Capita has proven not to be an important metric in analysing SIDS.

Thirty years on since 1994, the international development landscape has changed remarkably. SIDS now face multiple threats in addition to the existen-

tial challenges of Climate Change. Other major challenges include a soaring debt burden, marginalization in global trade, and high energy costs, to name a few. The vision of a New International Economic Order (NIEO) and “global negotiations” have disappeared from international discourse, and we work now to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) in Antigua and Barbuda to review the BPOA must attempt to connect to all the major achievements that SIDS have made over the thirty-year period. The outcome document must be proactive and forward looking and should attempt to place SIDS firmly in the international community. SIDS must cut through the rhetoric and move to action.

SIDS must continue to raise a clear and coordinated voice on the existential threat posed by Climate Change and continue to agitate and advocate for reform of the international financial architecture among other things. SIDS should also consider whether the five- and ten-year reviews are adequate. Maybe the review periods should be shorter given the nature of rapid change in the international environment. The BPOA must be more than a platform, it must act as a springboard.

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