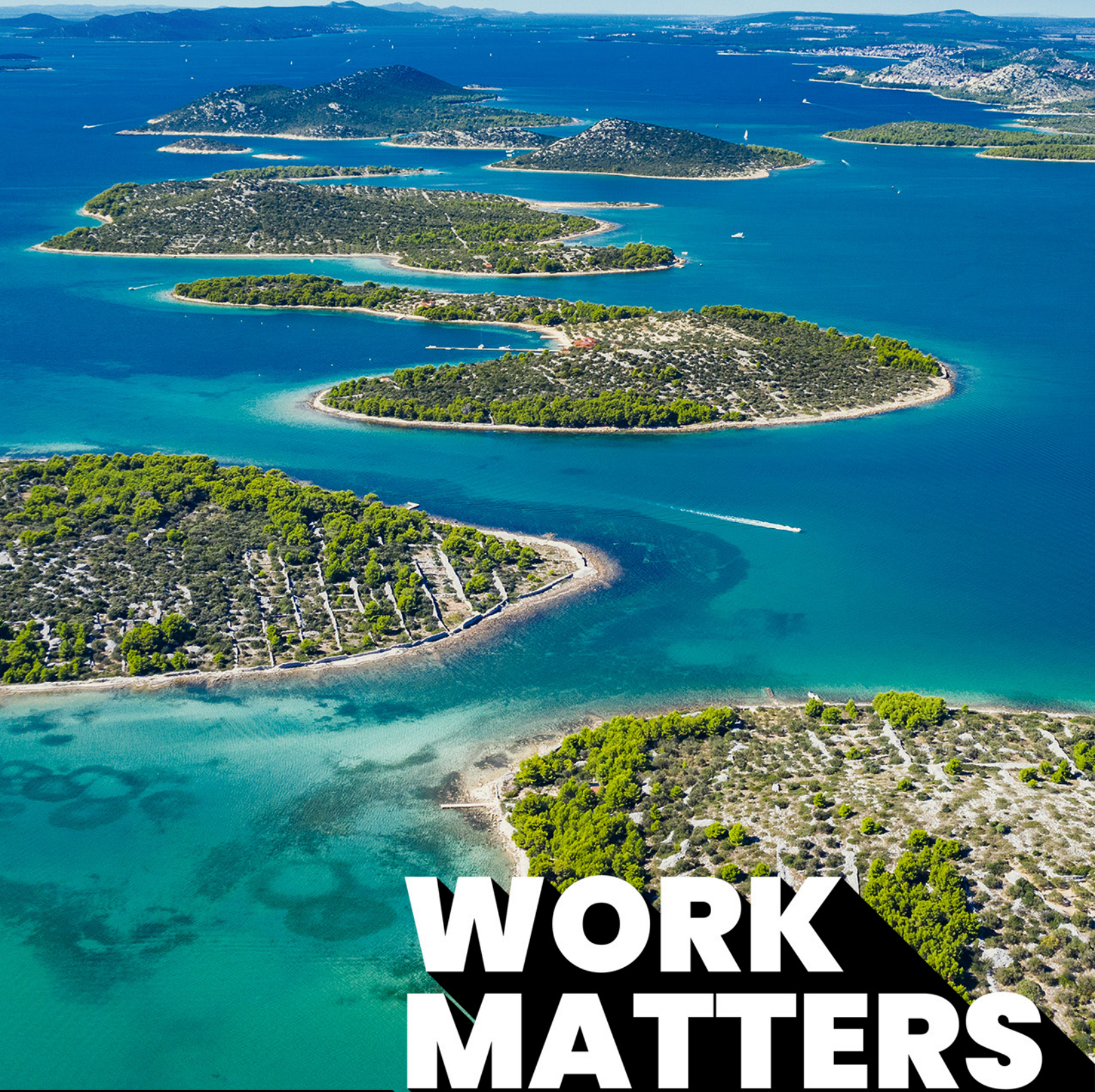




**CIPRIANI COLLEGE**  
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES



# WORK MATTERS COLUMN

**August 2024**

# SIDS4: From Platform to Springboard

Antigua and Barbuda hosted the Fourth International Conference of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) from 27 to 30 May 2024. This Fourth International Conference follows on from the Barbados Programme of Action in 1994 which established the foundational case for the special circumstances of SIDS. The Barbados Programme of Action was followed by the Mauritius Strategy in 2005, and the Samoa Pathway in 2014. These Conferences have followed a ten-year review cycle and have attempted on each occasion to access the progress made by this group of countries.

The theme of this Conference was “A Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity”. It was clear from the outset that in the ten-year period since Samoa, while there have been some successes, overall, SIDS have existed in an international system troubled by major power tensions and conflicts and have faced several crises that challenge and restrict their attempt to achieve sustainable development. All SIDS face the existential threat of Climate Change, are recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, and several are burdened with crushing debt and a lack of adequate international financial support. All commentators, leading up to the Conference indicated that it had to be different and more than an exercise in hyperbole.

The opening session had an impressive list of speakers led by the Honourable Gaston Browne, host Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, King Charles III, Antonio Guterres, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ambassador Dennis Francis, the President of the United Nations General Assembly and several political leaders from the Global South. All speakers recognized that SIDS are on the frontline of the climate challenge and in the words of the Secretary General of the United Nations “SIDS are a test case for Climate Justice and Financial Justice”. There was a sense by many participants that the ten-year reviews were not working to the benefit of these countries and there was a need for these reviews to be more integrated into a fast-changing global environment.

The Antigua and Barbuda Conference after days of deliberations adopted a forward-looking outcome document which builds on the outcomes of earlier conferences, establishes platforms and attempts to answer the question, “What do SIDS want?” The document integrates the outcomes from the previous Conferences and highlights issues critical for SIDS identified in the last ten years in the Samoa Pathway. In broad terms, the outcome document indicates that SIDS aim at achieving the following: building resilient economies, fostering safe, healthy and prosperous societies, ensuring a secure future and achieving environmental protection sustainability.

Notwithstanding, “Finance is the fuel that powers sustainable development”, without adequate finance the Caribbean analogy between “top” and “mud” comes into sharp focus.

It is evident that concerns on the issue of unsustainable debt of SIDS was a major concern of the Conference and the Debt Sustainability Support Service is particularly interesting. It is evident also that the support of the international community, including the United Nations system, for SIDS had not been effective and therefore there is a call for “a reinvigorated enabling environment”. The document calls on the United Nations system therefore to play an enhanced role and to monitor the advances made by SIDS.

Further, it can be argued that without a change in the international financial infrastructure and the attitudes of the developed country emitters, there will be little chance to register progress. The imperative for the developed world to honour their commitments to the Global South within the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and to adequately capitalize the recently operationalized Loss and Damage Fund are key issues.

This piece is written after Hurricane Beryl stomped through the Caribbean leaving a path of destruction

of property, loss of livelihoods and sadly loss of lives. We are reminded of our vulnerability and how the challenge of Climate Change impacts our lives and prospects. We are at the business end of a crisis we did not create.

The SIDS4 Conference cannot be another ten-year ritual. The Conference must be a springboard to action by the international community since SIDS inhabit a poorly defended front line. The United Nations “Summit of the Future” in New York in September and the Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Baku, Azerbaijan in November present opportunities to take the fight forward. We cannot wait for another ten years.

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