

Moving the SIDS-EU partnership

Forward, together, post-2015

Now's the time

If you're going to do anything for the small island developing states, the SIDS, whether it is in climate change or sustainable development, do it this year.

2014 is the International Year for Small Island Developing States, the first time the United Nations has ever dedicated a year to a specific group of countries.

2014 is also the year the United Nations holds its Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States which will be hosted by Samoa this September.

It follows the first conference in Barbados in 1994 and the second in Mauritius in 2005, but what makes Samoa stand out even before it is held is that it is taking place not only during the International Year of SIDS, but also

- the same month as the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Summit in New York, and on the eve of
- the 2015 climate agreement in Paris, and
- the launching of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

So if you are going to do something to help us tackle climate change, or if you're going to contribute to our sustainable development efforts, do it now.

What role for the EU in Samoa

So "what role for the EU" at the SIDS conference in Samoa? I would submit that we should answer this within the context of the historical partnership many SIDS have with the European Union. The theme of the Samoa conference is "The sustainable development of Small Island Developing States through genuine and durable partnerships".

The SIDS-EU partnership will probably be one of the oldest on display in Samoa. It dates back to when many of our islands were colonies of countries which today are part of the EU...in Seychelles' case we were first a French colony and then British.

During that era we, as colonies, contributed to making the EU what it is today. Those ties have continued past our independence in the 1970s and 80s till today when some 60% of the SIDS have reached middle income or highly developed status.

We have overcome, with the help of our partners in the EU and elsewhere, including in more recent times in the developing South, many hurdles in building nationhood, only to face even more daunting challenges to our fragile economies in climate change, which threatens the very existence of some SIDS, and a weak global economy which could roll back much of what we have achieved so far.

So, please do come to Samoa, both as the EU and as individual countries, and when you do, please do so at the highest level possible. The heads of state and government of the SIDS who will greet you do not expect to be discussing the future of our countries with junior representatives.

This is why we are very happy to learn that the President of the European Commission himself, Mr Jose Manuel Barroso, intends to be there. We hope the individual EU member countries follow his example.

There is another reason the SIDS would like their EU partners to participate at the highest level possible. The more senior the EU representatives, the better the messages we expect to hear.

What we expect to hear

In Samoa we would like to hear how the EU sees our partnership further developing in the lead up to, and in, the post-2015 era. There are two post-2015 processes ahead of us: the Post-2015 Development Agenda with the SDGs at the centre, and the implementation of the new climate agreement that the international community is expected to reach in Paris.

In Samoa you will hear the SIDS positioning themselves on the road to the Paris agreement and the launch of the post-2015 sustainable development process, how we would like to see ourselves in them and what we hope to get out of them.

You will obviously hear a lot about climate change - and here I'd like to thank Commissioner Hedegaard, who has seen for herself the challenges the Pacific SIDS face, for her passion and commitment – and about the oceans.

We are Small Island Developing States when we engage in the climate and sustainable development processes, but turn into Large Ocean States when our immense marine spaces come into play.

Please let me here make special mention of what I, and I'm sure many other islanders, consider to be one of the most terrifying threats to our coral reefs and fisheries: ocean acidification.

A lot has been, and, quite rightly, continues to be said about the degradation of our coral reefs, the dangers of ocean warming and marine pollution, and the persistence of unsustainable fishing practices. But why is the biggest emerging menace to our oceans, acidification, still relegated to a "research issue" in the climate negotiations?

Another SIDS challenge we will talk a lot about in Samoa is our shift to renewable energy and energy efficiency. It is both a clean way to fuel our sustainable development, and a way for our islands, which are least responsible for climate change but which suffer the most from it, to do our bit to show leadership in mitigation.

You will also hear how high indebtedness is a millstone around the necks of many SIDS, especially middle income ones which no longer qualify for grant or concessionary funding, as we search for new and sustainable ways to finance our development beyond 2015.

The ongoing negotiations at the United Nations in New York on the outcome document for the SIDS conference give a clear indication of other priorities we would like our development partners to address in Samoa.

Global Island Partnership

GLISPA, the Global Island Partnership whose steering committee I chair, will also be in Samoa and I'd like to take this opportunity to invite the EU delegation to our high level evening event on September 3 titled "Building Resilient and Sustainable Island Communities through Innovative Partnerships".

GLISPA focuses on conservation of island biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods, and on ecosystem based adaptation to climate change as contributors to sustainable development. However, when we in GLISPA talk about islands, we mean all islands.

As a non-political partnership of islands irrespective of their political status and countries which have islands – and the EU has many of those – GLISPA has in recent years been increasingly reaching out to, and engaging with Europe's overseas countries and territories.

One of the newest partners in GLISPA, which is led by the leaders of three SIDS, the Presidents of Seychelles and Palau and the Prime Minister of Grenada, is the British Virgin Islands which, as you know, is the current chair of OCTA, the EU's Overseas Countries and Territories Association.

The European Union's overseas countries and territories include more than 150 islands covering a total land area equivalent to that of the EU, and an ocean territory which is the largest in the world

As chair of the GLISPA Steering Committee I would thus like to use this occasion to urge the EU to make use of its many islands and ocean territories to further the cause of **all** islands, including the SIDS, all over the world.

The EU's overseas island and ocean territories could help strengthen your credentials as champions of islands, oceans and seas, and GLISPA stands ready to partner with you on this.

A good way to do this would be through regional island partnerships similar to the existing Micronesia Challenge, which the EU and the German Government are involved in, and the Caribbean Challenge Initiative, which includes the British Virgin Islands.

The newest of these regional partnerships, the Seychelles-led Western Indian Ocean Coastal Challenge (WIOCC), will be launched in Samoa with the help of GLISPA. The WIOCC has received funding from the EU through the Indian Ocean Commission ISLANDS project, and we look forward to further support as the partnership moves from operationalization to implementation.

Alliance of Small Island States

As was announced, I've come to take part in this event from the latest round of climate change negotiations now taking place in Bonn where the Alliance of Small Island States, AOSIS, continues to carry on the noble fight to save the SIDS.

Speaking as the chief spokesperson of AOSIS, may I note that when we fight for the SIDS in the climate negotiations, we fight to save **all** islands, including **yours** as well! Similarly, whatever the European Union does to save its overseas island countries and territories from climate change serves to save **all** islands.

Likewise, when the EU helps its islands conserve and sustainably manage and use their exceptional and unique biodiversity, such as through the BEST initiative, it helps increase understanding within the individual members of the European Union and the international community of the challenges **all** islands face.

This is one of the reasons why GLISPA believes, in its humble opinion, that the BEST initiative deserves the support of the whole Commission.

Whether we are small island developing states or overseas countries and territories, **all** islands will face even more daunting challenges post-2015 as climate change becomes increasingly destructive.

Next EU presidency

One of the countries which has islands that has stood strong with GLISPA from the beginning almost a decade ago is Italy, which will hold the EU presidency in the second half of this year.

Italy will lead Europe through

- the SIDS conference in Samoa,
- the UN Secretary-General's Climate Summit in New York,
- COP 12 of the CBD, the Convention on Biological Diversity, in South Korea,
- the International Conference on Biodiversity and Climate Change in Guadeloupe which will focus on the EU's overseas islands,
- the UN climate change conference in Lima, Peru which will be the last COP on the road to the Paris agreement, and
- the last six months of the International Year of Small Island Developing States.

Seychelles, GLISPA and AOSIS look forward to an Italian leadership of the European Union inspired by all these opportunities to renew the EU's championship of island issues, both within its own territories and in the small island developing states.

Let us begin in Samoa with the Small Island Developing States and the European Union strengthening and building on historic, ongoing and proven partnerships and forging new ones.

Let us build resilient and sustainable communities and islands together, beyond 2015.

I thank you all for your kind attention