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Small Island Developing States Are in Hot Water: Here's What the International Community Must Do to Help

By Li Junhua

The world's small island developing States (SIDS) are among the most vulnerable countries on the planet. And they are in trouble. Some of them are literally sinking. Or, to be more exact, the waters that surround them are inching higher, threatening to swallow them up.

Those same waters, which for millennia have been their source of food and their channel for transport, is also getting warmer and more acidic, killing fish and coral, and becoming more chaotic in its movements.

SIDS are, in fact, large ocean states: Only 3.5 per cent of the area they control is land, while 96.5 per cent is ocean. The deteriorating state of oceans represents an existential threat to the entire planet and SIDS are at the front-line of this war. If we do not help them turn the tide, then the battle for our future on this planet will be lost.

Island nations face a unique set of challenges due to their small size, remoteness, exposure to natural disasters, and dependence on faraway markets and resources. These challenges are compounded by climate change, volatile global markets and the ongoing repercussions of the pandemic further. The cumulative impact of these challenges undermines SIDS' capacity to cope with current challenges, future shocks and crises, and their efforts to build equitable societies.

Next year in Antigua and Barbuda, the United Nations will convene an international conference on the small island developing States. The agenda gives a sense of the urgency of the problem. It will tackle issues like climate change, sea-level rise, and biodiversity loss side-by-side with the

global debt crisis and rising inequality. The result will be a new 10-year plan of action for SIDS, one agreed between the small island nations and international partners.

We must use the opportunity of the fourth International Conference on SIDs to help these nations overcome the barriers that hinder their progress and potential. It is our responsibility to help them survive this existential crisis thrust upon them by climate change and outdated global-level systems.

That is why this week in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, we are gathering with the governments from 16 Caribbean states, to hear firsthand an assessment of regional progress and their priorities for the new plan.

These assessments will be the foundation for a more ambitious, coherent, and effective global response that recognizes the special needs and circumstances of these countries and provides them with adequate means of implementation, including access to finance, data, technology, capacity-building, and trade.

The United Nations is committed to supporting SIDS in their quest for a more resilient and sustainable future. To most of us, these small islands may seem distant and set apart, small dots on an expansive globe, but we must remember that the problems that SIDS face today are the ones that the rest of the world must confront tomorrow..

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