

AOSIS Media Release

The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) Warmly Welcomes the Entry
into force of Kyoto Protocol

New York, Wednesday, 16th February 2005: The Alliance of Small Island States, (AOSIS), warmly welcomes the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change today. The Alliance is made up of 43 small islands and low-lying coastal countries, and they all share common development and environmental concerns particularly their unique vulnerability to the negative impacts of climate change, sea level rise and extreme weather events.

As stated by the Permanent Representative of Mauritius to the United Nations and AOSIS Chairman, Ambassador Jagdish Koonjul, AOSIS sincerely welcomes the coming into force of the Kyoto Protocol today. Its entry into force is a milestone in international cooperation to combat climate change, and to help us move forward.

It shows that many countries like Russia, Canada, Japan and those in the European Union have demonstrated their concern for climate change by ratifying the Protocol. Unfortunately it also shows that a few countries are clearly out of step with the rest of the world by not ratifying.

Members of the AOSIS have played a significant role in the negotiations leading up to the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in Kyoto, Japan 1997. Indeed it was the AOSIS that originally proposed the idea of a protocol in 1994. AOSIS realised in the early 1990's that the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was not creating enough incentives to encourage countries to significantly reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and that legally binding commitments would be required.

The Kyoto Protocol has introduced targets and timeframes for industrialized countries to reduce their emissions by creating market-based mechanisms to reduce GHG emissions. AOSIS sees the Kyoto Protocol as a small, but significant step which creates a new carbon market which will provide useful financial incentives for the development and use of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies.

Small island countries are already suffering from the effects of climate change and sea level rise. The devastating hurricanes and cyclones that hit the Caribbean and the Pacific, and the tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean region, last year, are testimony to the increasing impacts of climate change and destructions to our whole economies by these severe weather events.

But the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol is only the first step. More needs to be done. For vulnerable small island countries, we need international support to help us protect our fragile countries from the ravages of climate change and sea level rise. Adaptation actions in small islands are urgently needed.

At an International Meeting on the Review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island States, in Mauritius last month, small island countries, called for the establishment of a new insurance facility to help underwrite the cost of severe weather damage and other climate change related impacts. They also called for special funding to allow them to build their defences against the impacts of climate change. This included funding to protect freshwater resources, a very precious resource in small islands, funding to adapt through new forms of agriculture, building design, and coastal protection measures. This is particularly poignant today, as the Kyoto Protocol enters into force, and the South Pacific islands of Samoa, American Samoa and Cook Islands face down two tropical cyclones, one of which may reach super-cyclone status. Our prayers are with our fellow islanders, and we hope that the damage and loss of lives will not be devastating.

Adaptation efforts against the impacts of climate change should also be implemented hand in hand with mitigation actions at its source. While key industrialised countries have taken steps to reduce their emissions, AOSIS believes that all countries should make pledges to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. This must be done in a fair and equitable manner. In particular, greenhouse gas emitting developing countries should take pledges to reduce their emissions, but this must be done with the necessary financial and technical support of the industrialised world.

AOSIS believes that a new collaborative agreement to advance the Kyoto Protocol is needed so that all countries can make a contribution to reducing emissions. This is a global problem, and as such the participation of all countries is vital to ensure an effective global response.

It is time for ALL countries to start a new dialogue so that we can Advance a more comprehensive approach to combating climate change, and towards a new collaborative agreement that embraces a broader approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

A new era to combat climate change meaningfully has started with the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol today. While AOSIS wish certainly to congratulate all those that ratified the Kyoto Protocol,

it is also very much hoped that soon all countries will pledge to ratify and to significantly reduce their GHG emissions.