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Statement By The Holy See At The 2024 High-Level Political Forum On Sustainable Development Small Island Developing States: Implementing The Outcomes Of The Fourth SIDS Conference

By H. E. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia

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Madam Chair,

As we discuss the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth International Conference on Small Islands Developing States (SIDS4), it is evident that the international community, as a “family of nations,” bears the responsibility to provide assistance to countries in special situations, including SIDS, in their pursuit of sustainable development.

It is of great concern how the challenges faced by countries in special situations hinder the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among others, these include crippling debts, slow growth prospects, persistent food insecurity and malnutrition, extreme vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters.

The 2030 Agenda includes a commitment to prioritize reaching those “furthest behind first.”[1] As Pope Francis has observed, this implies that “we are responsible for the fragility of others as we strive to build a common future.”[2] Consequently, it is imperative that the specific development needs and priorities of countries in special situations are properly addressed, as this is not a matter of choice, but a moral imperative for the international community.

Madam Chair,

The adoption of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) represents a reaffirmation of the unique vulnerabilities faced by SIDS and a renewed commitment to support them in their pursuit of resilient prosperity. The effective implementation of the ABAS requires countries to provide SIDS with the fiscal space needed to invest in the transformative programmes that address the needs of their people.

The mounting burden of debt borne by numerous SIDS is becoming increasingly unsustainable, and is already threatening to undermine the implementation of the ABAS before it has really begun. The current debt obligations trap SIDS in a cycle of dependence that impedes their capacity to address the most pressing issues including poverty eradication and climate change. If the objective is to facilitate the resilient prosperity of SIDS, it is essential to provide them with the fiscal space to make investments in healthcare, education and social protection systems.

My Delegation reiterates its call on wealthier nations to consider debt relief, or indeed, debt cancellation. Such radical but necessary action will liberate SIDS from the untenable choice between servicing mounting interest payments, or allocating resources to invest in health, education, social protection systems and infrastructure.

Madam Chair,

In conclusion, my Delegation calls upon all Member States to reaffirm their commitment to the sustainable development of countries in special situations through tangible action and enhanced cooperation. The construction of a resilient and prosperous future for SIDS and, by extension, for the entire family of nations, can only be achieved through collective efforts and shared responsibility.

Thank you.

[1] United Nations, 2030 Agenda

[2] Pope Francis, Papal Encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, 115.



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