



**SMALL STATES
CONFERENCE ON
SEA LEVEL RISE**
MALE, 14 - 18 NOVEMBER 1989

VANUATU
COUNTRY STATEMENT

by

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Mr. Chairman, Honourable Colleagues, Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I like to take this opportunity first of all to pass on greetings from President, Government and people of Vanuatu to Head of State, Government and people of the Republic of Maldives.

Vanuatu Government is very thankful for the invitation extended by the maldives Government to participate in this very important SMALL STATE Conference on SEA LEVEL RISE. Thirdly Vanuatu delegation is grateful for the very hospitality received from Government and people of Maldives ever since our arrival here.

Mr. Chairman, the Republic of Vanuatu consists of eighty main inhabited islands with a handful of low-lying coral lands. Being volcanic in origin each main island rises up in adverse diversity from tens to thousands of feet above sea level.

The country lies east of Sydney, south of Fiji and north of New Zealand.

Vanuatu is situated on the earthquake belt and is susceptible to cyclones/hurricanes which seasonally are expected between November and March every year.

The land is potentially agricultural, though population as well find their livelihood on sea shells and fish resources.

Mr. Chairman on the issue of SEA LEVEL RISE, there is consensus in the International Scientific Community that main impact on the global atmosphere is causing the earth temperature to rise, with particularly serious consequences. The rise in Sea Level is an example of these consequences. Small States including Vanuatu are relying heavily on international organisations, which are involved in environmental researches and the good will of the industrial nations to address this problem.

Mr. Chairman, The low lying atolls as well as most of Coastal States are developing states and are usually are small and have limited economic base. However following the signing of "Law of the Sea" Convention, all these states have enjoyed extended jurisdiction over the resources within the 200 miles Exclusive Economic Zone. These states though have small land masses, they are blessed with a big ocean surrounding them and therefore fisheries development in some of these states are the only real economic development opportunity existing. Although industrial and oceanic fisheries are common in some of these states it would

be fair to say that fisheries development in these states would be mostly coastal and near shore fisheries.

Mr. Chairman, in Vanuatu the village fisheries from the inner reef and lagoon is estimated to produce 2,400 tons of fish/fish product annually, mostly for subsistence use. This amounts to over five tons per km² for the inner shore and lagoon areas and is probably reaching maximum sustainability of these resources. Fisheries development is concentrating on deep bottom fishing (80 - 300 meters) which could sustain an annual harvest of 740 tons of highest quality fish. This project involves up to 100 small artisinal fishing boats. The offshore tuna resources has been exploited by distant water fishing nations through excess fishing agreement. Currently in excess of 60 foreign fishing boats are being to fish in Vanuatu EEZ.

Mr. Chairman, generally the most obvious impact on possible effect of rise in sea level on fisheries will be the displacement of the fishermen and their homes which are usually very near the sea, usually on levels less than three meters above the high water level. The physical dislocation could create a chain reaction into the social and economic structure of societies and governments. The other disadvantage would be the submerging of low coral reefs and even atolls which were once used as baseline points to establish states EEZ. One could argue that there are advantages w;hen treating the issue in isolation however in practical sense, it is difficult to isolate fisheries development from the whole socio-economical and political factors, therefore in aggregate the rise in sea level will severely disadvantage our fisheries sector.

Mr. Chairman, when this happens, in Vanuatu, structural development on few low lying islands and near shores would be affected, These include fish and rise plants, boat ramps, slipways and various foreshore development including fishermen's homes and mariculture researches.

As well as affecting developments, this will also have an impact on future policy towards development of fisheries and related activities. In other words more careful appraisal and consideration will be required before development projects are approved for implementation. Also it would require the Government to review its Fisheries Development Plan in relation to information and findings by international organisations in involved in Science and the environment.

Mr Chairman, in conclusion, I must say that Vanuatu has been involved in regional and international meetings on Sea Level Rise and Climatological Changes and is very keen to continue to participate in these meetings. Vanuatu like other Small State Countries do not have the necessary expertise and appropriate resources to monitor and carry out researches on these environmental changes. Therefore our participation in meetings and receipts of reports and findings from international organisations will be very heavily relied on. We join in with our neighbours from in the Pacific to call on the industrial countries to recognise these potential problems and work together with Small Countries in an effort to find solutions and develop a plan of actions to take.

Once again, Vanuatu extends to Maldive Government, her appreciation for being invited to this meeting.