

Testimony of Ronald Jumeau, Seychelles Ambassador for Climate Change and Small Island Developing State Issues

House Committee on Energy and Commerce Democratic forum on climate change

“The Universal Agenda of Climate Justice: from Seychelles to the Capitol”

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Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for this opportunity to put forward the case of Seychelles and other Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as we head into the Paris Climate Summit in less than two weeks. This is an important moment for United States leadership in addressing our global future on climate change in ways that foster progress, sustainable growth and development and a globally sustainable economy.

As we look forwards towards COP21 and towards the implementation stage of the Post-2015 Agenda (now referred to as 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), it is a time to consider the roles we all must play towards a resilient world that is strengthened rather than weakened by its citizens.

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), the Republic of Seychelles is one of a group of countries that is especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and climate variability, and it gives priority concern to adaptation to climate change as communicated in our INDC. The threats caused by climate change will have significant impacts on Seychelles in the short, medium and longer term on infrastructure, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, energy and water security, biodiversity, waste management and on human health and well-being. Now is not the time for Business as Usual, it is the time for Business as Urgent.

Seychelles is about to embark on its Third National Communication to the UNFCCC, which will eventually produce updated findings with respect to climate change trends and projected impacts. The main climate change threats facing Seychelles are similar to those threatening other small island developing states: changes in rainfall patterns leading to flooding, landslides on one hand and extended periods of drought on the other, increases in sea temperature, changes in ocean acidity and damage to marine ecosystems, increases in storms and storm surges, and sea level rise in the longer term.

In my testimony today, I will focus my remarks on the impacts of climate change on Small Island States, or rather, Large Ocean States, and on how we can all play our part in creating a sustainable future built on the foundations of climate justice.

Small Island States: The impacts of climate change hit the poor first and worst

The geographical and physical vulnerability of Small Island States must not be understated. A universal and binding Paris Agreement is essential to ensure the survival of island states, communities and habitats.

Preferential access to climate finance for SIDS, Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and other vulnerable countries is imperative to ensure that when the most vulnerable are hit first; they have a means of coping with the stresses that climate change places on both people and planet.

It is our global responsibility to ensure that this transition is as smooth for everyone as possible. But it is a commitment we must make. The cost of achieving the mitigation reduction objective (2030) in Seychelles has been estimated to be at least USD 309 million. The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) holds the position that climate finance provided by developed countries should scale up post-2020 from floor of \$100 billion. In addition, developed countries should provide pathways for how climate finance will be scaled up.

Which is why SIDS are pushing to limit the increase in global temperature to below 1.5 degrees rather than below 2 degrees.

With the growing threat of a changing climate, limited in natural resources and in capacity, isolated in location, we turn to our oceans as the driving force for our future, and the future of generations to come. But the health and wellbeing of the oceans is dependent on the state of our climate.

As you may be aware, over the last three years or so, the emerging concept of the Blue Economy has been embraced by many SIDS and coastal nations as a mechanism to realize sustainable growth based around an ocean or marine-based economy. It recognizes the need to maximize the enormous economic potential of oceans and seas, while preserving them, and in doing so has fostered a much needed global dialogue on the vital role of the oceans in sustainable development.

This is about building on our capacity as an island or ocean state, and understanding that we all have our role to play in creating our global future. Be this through technology transfer, legislative reform or

humanitarian assistance, we all have the opportunity now in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to be what we would like to call a Blue Guardian, to be a champion of the solutions.

It is a universal problem: we all must play our role in championing the solutions

Climate change adaptation has been mainstreamed in the Seychelles Strategic Plan (2015) which is the definitive document intended to guide land-use management during the next 25 years. The plan has been developed with reference to sectoral plans by various ministries and is intended to provide an integrated framework for the development of new plans, particularly regarding land use. Ambitious and actualized actions on climate change are the only way to create not only the future we all want, but the future we all need.

However, this is not just a problem facing SIDS. The British Met Office said global temperatures in January-September were 1.02 C above the 1850-1900 average, adding that the remainder of the year is expected to remain hot because of the El Nino weather phenomenon.[1] Pushed by the burning of coal, oil and gas for energy, global CO₂ levels are now 143 percent higher than before the industrial revolution. Scientists say that's the main driver of global warming.

As demonstrated by the US Clean Energy Act and Inclusive Prosperity Act of 2015, among many others- none of us exist in isolation, or are immune to the implications of climate change. With regards to legislation, Seychelles is already in the process of revising and establishing laws such as the new Disaster Risk Management Act. Other legislation may also need to be reviewed and amended in light of climate change adaptation needs. In the US, there have been nearly 100 bills focusing specifically on climate change have been introduced in the 114th Congress. Over 70 percent of these bills favour climate action, with nearly half of those bills dealing with climate change adaptation (also known as resilience) and climate science.[2] But we can do more.

What it is essential to remember is that island states are small states in terms of the size of their human resources and economies; SIDS do not have sufficient expertise, technology or funds to cope with the ramifications of mankind's recklessness with the ocean. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO 2012) estimates over 87% of marine stocks globally are fully or over exploited, and as interest in seabed mining booms, we must ask ourselves what we are truly willing to sacrifice in the long-term, for our short term material gain? The problem is exacerbated by rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification and growing numbers of de-oxygenated zones. This is about more than

words. The challenges facing SIDS, the challenges facing us all, require urgent, coordinated action.

Climate disasters threaten to overwhelm our global humanitarian system

In the next 40 years, climate-related disasters are projected to displace between 150 million and one billion people. Two billion people live in regions expected to become severely water stressed. Seychelles, where 80% of the population live, and more than 80% of economic activity occur on the coast, continues to be affected by the challenges of water insecurity, and it is a commonly held misconception that sea-level rise is what renders our small island states immediately vulnerable to being unable to live in our home countries.

Before sea-level rise covers low-lying atolls such as Tuvalu, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands and Maldives, the implications of loss and damage such as climate disasters and the intrusion of saline water into freshwater lenses and agricultural land pose great threats to our Large Ocean States, and to our planet.

Loss and damage is a key part of the agreement for Island States, separate from Adaptation. And looking at the hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons, droughts and famine affecting all corners of our world—climate change is increasing shown either as a cause of, or as having a multiplier effect on disasters, health crises and both national and international security.

Migration and refugee crises, increasing inequality and vulnerability to disasters, will only incite further instability and popular unrest as governments struggle to meet the needs of their people. The United States may be forced to address these significant threats to international stability and national security. Climate security must be addressed both by the United States and by the world more broadly, as an area needing direct attention.

Addressing climate change solely through adaptation and reactionary means is not enough. This is one of the reasons why Seychelles is taking strong actions on mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. Because we have seen the implications of not doing so, and we know that there is no choice if we have hope of achieving a fair and safe future for all.

The United States government has a role to play in tackling climate change

Genuine sustainable action on climate change requires a partnership between people and our blue planet, and it is one that is imperative for our social, economic and environmental future. SIDS are particularly vulnerable to climate change and are already experiencing such damaging effects as sea-level rise, coral bleaching, extreme weather and changing migration patterns.

Uncoordinated and excessive exploitation of resources hinders our ability to become the strongest version of ourselves. Islands already know the effects of climate change. We are already seeing loss and damage. So we know the consequences of failing to provide our planet, in its capabilities and vastness, with the respect and sustainability practices that it deserves.

The Paris climate summit offers the opportunity as a global community to build on our national commitments to create the best possible tomorrow, a future that the generations which shall follow us deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my testimony to you today, and for your time.

[1] http://www.wral.com/un-agency-carbon-dioxide-levels-hit-record-high-in-2014/15071816/?utm_campaign=webshare

[2] <http://www.c2es.org/federal/congress>