

## **ISLANDS NEED ACTION NOW!**

**Remarks by Ronny Jumeau,**

**Seychelles Ambassador for Climate Change and Small Island Developing State Issues**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Islands need action NOW!

- The challenges facing island biodiversity, and indeed the very sustainability of islands, are massive and increasing.
- As the people who call these islands home, we islanders have committed ourselves to the solutions, often in ways that belie our size.
- For if we do not act now, if we do not work together, as Parties we will all fail.

Not only is our precious and often unique biodiversity disappearing - like everywhere else you may say - but it is doing so much more alarmingly than anywhere else. Extinction rates for birds, for example, are a whopping 187 times higher on islands and for mammals 177 times higher.

This loss is increasingly affecting our options for sustainable development, including poverty eradication, whittling away at our resilience to climate change, and taxing our dependence on ecosystem services.

So critical is biodiversity to islands - the main drivers of the Seychelles economy for example are tourism and fisheries, making us heavily dependent on our natural environment - that if the current rate of loss continues, small island states could lose up to 57% of their GDP by 2050 according to TEEB, the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity Report!

We are not begging here: in many ways island countries are, despite their smallness and limited resources, leading by example such as through the Micronesian and Caribbean challenges, the Coral Triangle Initiative, the Phoenix Islands Protected Area, and the Western Indian Ocean Coastal Challenge , the WIO-CC, now being developed.

In Seychelles half the little land territory we have is protected. Land is the scarcest resource of all on small islands and as we continuously point out, we sacrificed development, or at least development as we have traditionally known it, for conservation of the 50% of our land that we have protected.

And as we ran out of flat land, we opted to borrow at international market rates to build several new islands for development rather than encroach on our national parks and nature reserves, and to limit as much as we could construction in the hills.

We thus became heavily indebted to protect our forested slopes as rain catchment areas and carbon sinks, and to preserve them as part of the rich natural heritage that has made Seychelles one of the world's most exclusive tourism destinations.

In another example of island leadership I was just 10 days ago very proud to deposit Seychelles' ratification of the Nagoya Protocol to the United Nations in New York, making us the first island state, and only the fourth country in the world, to do so.

Island biodiversity is also important to countries with islands, irrespective of their level of development. What happens in extremely biodiverse European Union overseas islands in the various regions of the world, may determine, to a large extent, whether the EU will reach all of the Aichi targets.

We therefore welcome new steps through the European Parliament's two-year Preparatory Action for a Voluntary Scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem based Services in the Territories of European Overseas Entities, known as BEST for short, as a promising signal of both greater recognition of, and investment by the EU in protecting the biodiversity of its island territories, and of increased involvement in the Convention of overseas islands of CBD Parties.

As I said, as islands we are not coming to the international community with a begging bowl: what islands are asking for is more and stronger cooperation and support to help us help ourselves at a time of unprecedented stress on the world's natural, financial and economic resources.

And helping islands help themselves is what GLISPA, the Global Island Partnership, is all about. I speak for GLISPA as well as Seychelles as it is co-chaired by the heads of state and government of Palau in the Pacific, Grenada in the Caribbean and Seychelles in the Indian Ocean.

All three island countries have put the promotion of biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods at the fore of their sustainable development agendas by championing the Micronesia, Caribbean and Western Indian Ocean challenges respectively.

We are also advocating for critical island biodiversity issues such as reducing the threat of invasive species on islands and addressing the worsening impacts of climate change through eco-system based adaptation wherever possible.

Dare I say our small countries have been putting our money where our mouths are as best we can in protecting and promoting island biodiversity in the face of the daunting challenges of climate change and global economic crisis, to which islands are more vulnerable than most.

A shining example of this is the Pacific island nation of Palau, a country of just 20,000 people whose President only last year allocated US\$1.4 million they had collected from a green fee to the Palau Protected Area Network as part of their commitment to the Micronesia Challenge.

The forthcoming COP will arguably be the last opportunity for it to address specific island issues. I understand that from now on implementation will use other platforms and integrate activities across all Programmes of Work and issues.

So let's do justice to those far flung but unique pocket champions of biodiversity and help them further help themselves in leading the world in the judicious use of their natural environments for the benefit of not just their populations and biodiversity, but of the common natural heritage of humankind. I thank you all for your kind attention.