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Ministerial declaration of the group of small island developing States to the fifteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

We, the ministers of small island developing States (SIDS),

Having met on the occasion of the fifteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XV) held from 3 to 7 October 2021,

Recalling the Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation, the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway,¹ which resulted from the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in September 2014 and set out the sustainable development priorities of SIDS, and recognizing that the SAMOA Pathway is consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,²

Recalling that member States, through the SAMOA Pathway, stressed their commitment “to take urgent and concrete action to address the vulnerability of small island developing States”,³ and that the General Assembly consistently reiterated this commitment in resolutions 70/202 of 22 December 2015, 71/225 of 21 December 2016, 72/217 of 20 December 2017, 73/228 of 20 December 2018, 74/217 of 19 December 2019 and 75/215 of 21 December 2020,

Reaffirming the unique and particular vulnerability of SIDS to exogenous shocks, owing to their size, geographical remoteness, the small scale of their economies, high dependence on external markets and extreme exposure to natural disasters and the effects of climate change,

Reiterating the need to address infrastructural gaps⁴ and for additional sustainable productive investment⁵ in SIDS, and our call, made in the Nairobi Maafikiano,⁶ for UNCTAD to support the efforts of SIDS to address their physical and economic vulnerabilities, promote structural economic transformation and build resilience and productive capacities,

¹ General Assembly resolution 69/15 of 14 November 2014, SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, annex.

² General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 21 October 2015, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

³ Paragraph 22 of the SAMOA Pathway.

⁴ Paragraph 70 of the Nairobi Maafikiano (TD/519/Add.2).

⁵ Paragraph 51 of the Nairobi Maafikiano.

⁶ Paragraph 76 (f).



Noting with grave concern the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sustainable development of SIDS, including the far-reaching and potentially enduring consequences for poverty eradication, employment, tourism, economic growth, debt burdens, empowerment of women and girls, youth development, education and social welfare, as well as the further deterioration in this context of the ability of SIDS to face external shocks,

Acknowledging the General Assembly's call, in December 2020, for "immediate and substantial actions to facilitate the responses of small island developing States to recover from the unfolding crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic",⁷

Noting that UNCTAD XV is the first opportunity for ministers to engage in multilateral dialogue on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the interrelated areas of trade and development,

Recalling that, at their virtual meeting in New York on 22 September 2021, on the margins of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Heads of States and Governments of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) called on UNCTAD to continue to provide support towards building the productive capacities of SIDS and to prioritise actions that will support their recovery from the trade and development challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change in order for them to become more resilient and attain the Sustainable Development Goals, and requested ministers of SIDS to advance the interests of the group at UNCTAD XV,

1. *Remain concerned* that many international financial institutions and other development partners of SIDS still rely solely on inadequate criteria, such as GDP/GNI per capita, to determine eligibility for concessional financing. The depth of the crisis caused by the pandemic demonstrates the need to continue work on vulnerability indices, with a view to ensuring that SIDS can access the support required to recover from and build resilience to external shocks.
2. *Underscore* that climate change impacts trade by causing disruptions to production, supply, transportation and distribution chains, and emphasize that the ability of SIDS to transition successfully from a state of acute vulnerability to sustainable levels of prosperity depends in large measure on advances in their technical, financial and institutional capacity to adapt to the economic and environmental shocks brought about by global climate change. We therefore call on UNCTAD to continue and strengthen its work in supporting the adoption and implementation by SIDS of climate-friendly trade and production strategies.
3. *Express deep concern* about the persistently high and unsustainable debt burdens of SIDS, which are exacerbated by their efforts to respond to natural disasters, the effects of climate change and other exogenous shocks. These debt-related challenges have been further compounded by the sharp decline in government revenue and increased expenditure caused by the pandemic. We therefore reiterate the call, made by the Heads of States and Governments of AOSIS, for development partners, as well as multilateral development banks and international financial institutions, to adopt more progressive approaches that provide expanded debt relief to SIDS, through existing and new financial instruments, including through, inter alia, cancellation, suspensions, rescheduling and restructuring and debt swaps, as well as other support measures. We further call on UNCTAD to continue its work on debt issues.
4. *Reject firmly* the unilateral and coercive blacklisting of countries as non-cooperative tax jurisdictions or countries which are deemed to have strategic deficiencies in their anti-money-laundering and combating the financing of terrorism frameworks. Such measures have long-lasting and detrimental effects on the economies of the countries concerned and their ability to build resilience.
5. *Also reject firmly* the imposition of unilateral coercive economic measures against developing countries, as stated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as such actions are inconsistent with the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations

⁷ General Assembly resolution 75/215 of 21 December 2020, paragraph 8.

and international law, and therefore reiterate the call, made by the Heads of States and Governments of AOSIS, for the international community to adopt urgent and effective measures to eliminate the use of unilateral coercive economic measures.

6. *Reaffirm* our commitment to multilateralism, including to a transparent, inclusive, fair and open rules-based multilateral trading system, with the World Trade Organization as its core institution. We call on UNCTAD to conduct research and technical analysis on the impact of the multilateral trading system and its rules on SIDS.

7. *Affirm* the value of South–South cooperation, including interregional cooperation, the sharing of models of best practices and the fostering of multi-stakeholder principles which will promote the attainment of the 2030 Agenda.

8. *Underscore* the nexus between trade and health policies, and the negative impact that health challenges facing SIDS, such as chronic non-communicable diseases and COVID-19, have on productivity. We encourage UNCTAD to work with other bodies, both within and outside the United Nations system, to promote the adoption of balanced health and trade agendas and policies.

9. *Call for* a United Nations Secretary-General-led initiative to agree on guiding principles for a new generation of international support measures aimed at reducing SIDS' vulnerabilities to systemic shocks and enhancing their resilience. We believe that UNCTAD should play a seminal role in the multilateral process underpinning this initiative.

10. *Support* the call for UNCTAD to continue its efforts in all its work to mainstream the cross-cutting issue of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

11. *Call on* UNCTAD to strengthen its technical support to the efforts of SIDS to address infrastructure gaps and build more diversified, sustainable and resilient economies. We therefore call on UNCTAD to undertake work in the following areas: growth and development of microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises in our countries; promotion of foreign direct investment in SIDS; development of the green economy, including the renewable energy sector; advancement to a sustainable ocean-based economy; promotion of creative industries; attraction and retention of skilled migrants; technological progress as an engine of innovation and smarter economic specialization in our countries; development of the digital and knowledge economy; implementation of trade facilitation reforms; trade and food security; and sustainable and resilient air and maritime transport.