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Leading Voices for World's Smallest Islands Gather in Mauritius to Build Resilience in the Face Climate Vulnerability, Volatile Food Prices

POINT AUX PIMENTS, MAURITIUS (23 April 2012)—Recognizing that most small island developing countries are on the front lines of climate change and sustainable development, leading experts and advocates from over 50 countries are gathering in Mauritius this week to discuss the challenges and opportunities for the world's most idyllic, yet highly vulnerable communities and landscapes.

Including countries like Mauritius, Haiti, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Jamaica, the United Nations currently classifies 52 countries and territories as Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Home to more than 50 million people, it is a diverse group of countries 43 of them located in the Caribbean and Pacific regions. The group includes relatively rich middle-income countries but also some of the poorest countries in the world.

Small islands have limited resources that are already heavily stressed. Due to a combination of natural, economic and geographic factors, most are only able to export a few products and many have a high dependence of intermediate imports. This makes them extremely vulnerable to climate change, high commodity prices, and volatile markets for agriculture, fisheries and tourism.

But more importantly there are new opportunities that they can seize to enhance resilience and sustainable development.

"In many SIDS countries there is a renewed role for agriculture to meet food security and nutrition," said Michael Hailu of the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA). "This will require promoting local production and consumption by supporting the local farmers and linking agriculture to other sectors such as tourism, ICTs, and bio-energy, mainly the production of ethanol with crops like sugar cane."

"There is usually great competition for land resources among tourism, agriculture and other land uses and the various uses should be carefully planned," he added. "Agriculture for food security is a priority in Africa, but nutrition, input prices, and trade is more of a critical issue for Caribbean and Pacific countries."

The meeting, *Small Island Economies: From Vulnerabilities to Opportunities*, held for the first time in Mauritius is the seventh Regional Policy meeting to review and discuss key issues and challenges for rural development faced by African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. The conference is being organized by CTA and hosted by the Government of Mauritius.

The aim of this annual event is to provide a platform for discussion and for the formulation of conducive policies. The objectives including raising awareness in ACP countries on the key challenges affecting SIDS; increasing the exchange of information and expertise on selected areas affecting SIDS and facilitate networking amongst development partners. The themes discussed revolved around four pillars – reducing vulnerability and building resilience to external shocks, adapting to climate change, building a green economy, and enhancing synergies between agriculture and tourism.

More than 100 participants, comprising chief executives, directors, academics, diplomats and experts in diverse fields from 41 countries, debated in-depth about key issues of particular importance to the SIDS. These include:

- SIDS + 20: history of the small islands development states
- Measuring and coping with economic vulnerability of SIDS
- Building economic resilience in SIDS through trade and climate change policies
- Challenges in international and regional trade and new opportunities for SIDS in market access
- Coastal and inland fisheries: old challenges and new opportunities
- Rethinking an institutional framework at the global and regional level to support sustainable development of SIDS

“Although small island nations across the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions have significant differences in terms of size, population, social and economic conditions, we all face similar challenges”, says Ambassador Shirley Skeritt-Andrew, Chair of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors.

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About CTA

The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) is a joint international institution of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States and the European Union (EU). Its mission is to advance food and nutritional security, increase prosperity and encourage sound natural resource management in ACP countries. It provides access to information and knowledge, facilitates policy dialogue and strengthens the capacity of agricultural and rural development institutions and communities. CTA operates under the framework of the Cotonou Agreement and is funded by the EU.

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