

# A U.N. Special Session on Climatic Threats to Island Nations

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

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On Sept. 27 and 28, they will get a chance to air their fears in a special session of the General Assembly. Their leaders say the time has come to go beyond reciting statistics to demonstrate the human toll that climate changes are already taking.

To compound the natural disasters, Mr. Slade said, the smallest nations now face a loss of trade concessions that sustained their agricultural economies. Recent World Trade Organization rulings made in the name of liberalization are cutting trade preferences, especially in the European Union.

## FULL TEXT

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"What we learn from the scientific community does not give us a great deal of comfort," said Tuiloma Neroni Slade, Samoa's representative at the United Nations and chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States.

"I think what we certainly know is that in the low-lying areas, the sea has claimed our burial grounds," he said. "That, of course, reflects the smallness of the available territory. But it also says that areas that are so very close to families and communities are being invaded. It is the beginning of that loss to communities that we fear."

To compound the natural disasters, Mr. Slade said, the smallest nations now face a loss of trade concessions that sustained their agricultural economies. Recent World Trade Organization rulings made in the name of liberalization are cutting trade preferences, especially in the European Union.

Tourism, which many island nations turned to as a rapid money earner, is no longer a panacea for several reasons, cultural and environmental. But the greatest threat to this industry may also be coming from the sea, Mr. Slade said.

"There is no escaping a hurricane that decides to hover over a relatively small land mass," he said. "In an industry

like tourism, hotels are often destroyed. It takes a long time to rehabilitate." Beaches and reefs are also disappearing, and biodiversity is being lost.

"Climate change is already taking effect in terms of some of the life support systems," he added. "For instance, in the Maldives, there is infiltration of fresh-water reserves by sea water. In many places, there is a degree of brackishness in the drinking water. You can see this in the Caribbean. You can certainly see this in the Pacific. Fresh-water reserves have been contaminated. Whether it is a storm surge or the sea rising, the waters get into the fresh water."

"Climate change is the type of global issue not of our making, so it raises questions of equity and ethics," he said, adding that the island nations will once again ask that larger nations cut back on their use of fossil fuels that heat the atmosphere.

Mr. Slade said that the island nations, often guided by international experts, initially tried to build barriers against the oceans. This is no longer realistic, he said.

"The natural protective action is to set up walls against an invading sea," he said. "It is quite physically impossible and also economically impossible for any one country or group of countries to undertake this. There are certain things we can do to adapt, but we cannot hide."

Several envoys of island nations said that global economic liberalization is hitting them just after they have diversified agricultural economies and begun to introduce small-scale industries, including textiles. These small-volume farming and factory products cannot compete in world markets. The 42 nations and territories represented this month at the special session, occurring five years after the first conference on small island states in Barbados, are expected to ask for better advice and concrete relief measures.

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