

Statement  
By  
President, LaVerne E. Ragster, Ph.D.  
University of the Virgin Islands  
for the  
**Launch of the Universities Consortium for Small Island States (UCSIS)**  
at the

International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Barbados Programme of  
Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Port Louis, Mauritius  
January 14, 2005

Mr. President, Excellencies, University Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, faculty, students and staff of the University of the Virgin Islands, it is my distinct pleasure and honor to bring you warm greetings and to thank the people of the Republic of Mauritius for hosting this historical meeting. Appreciation is also extended to the Chancellor of the University of Mauritius for his generous hospitality during our stay.

I stand before you today with a heightened sense of anticipation as we prepare to sign the Memorandum of Understanding to officially launch the University Consortium for Small Islands States. I am anticipating the fulfillment of more of the potential of higher education to contribute to the development of capacity and resilience building in the societies of our small island developing states. The University of the Virgin Islands is prepared to be an active partner in this endeavor.

Mr. President,

Higher education is a very powerful, but underutilized tool for developing our people into professionals and educated persons who have the knowledge, skills and experience to produce and implement the ideas, systems and institutions that will function synergistically and effectively within the constraints of small size, isolation, uncertainty and limited resources. It is appropriate and necessary for higher education institutions in small island states to take the leadership in addressing this challenge. Today my colleagues and I, representing our institutions, will sign a Memorandum that acknowledges we understand the lesson known by every aware islander – mutual respect in cooperation provides the basis for successful collaboration and produces results benefiting all. We look forward to our sister higher education institutions in small island states and other partners who support learning becoming a part of this exciting venture as we advance the Consortium's objectives. It was a very positive sign to receive indications of interest in the consortium from the Cape Verde Islands among others.

Mr. President,

This agreement will support our sharing resources and lessons learned from research and in educating people across the world in small island states. This sharing is expected to translate into stronger universities on small island developing states. These universities should be able to produce more small island professionals, including decision makers, that are increasingly effective at focusing knowledge, research, training and problem-solving approaches on the challenges facing the people and societies of (SIDS) small island developing states. This Consortium is an excellent example of using global resources to address local challenges and I am proud and humbled to be a part of the group that will support this initiative and in a concrete way help to implement the Barbados Programme of Action. As we begin the difficult, exciting work ahead, I must thank the many individuals from all of our universities and our partners like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) who labored to get us to this point. A special vote of appreciation is extended to Professor Albert Binger for his leadership role and for his passion for the vision of the Consortium.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, I believe it is time for us to get back to the demanding work of improving the living conditions and futures of people living in small island developing states using higher education as one of our best tools. The University of the Virgin Islands is ready. Thank you.