

THE PREMIER VIRGINIA TECH MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE

Small Islands, Big Problems: Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)

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SPECIALIZED COMMITTEE | BLACKSBURG, VA



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Dear Delegates of VTMUNC I,

We appreciate your participation and dedication to the premier Virginia Tech Model United Nations Conference's efforts to promote productive and civil discourse and conversation. Nevertheless, please be warned that some presentations, discussions, and or information found in the background guides may contain delicate or triggering material. At Virginia Tech, we prioritize fostering a safe and inclusive environment, so we want to ensure that you are prepared for the nature of the discussions to occur.

That being said, the following content areas may contain sensitive material:

- 1. Conflict Zones & Human Rights Violations:** Some conversations may involve sensitive global problems including human rights violations, armed conflicts, and or other difficult themes.
- 2. Sensitive Cultural or Religious Topics:** Some topics may raise sensitive cultural or religious issues for individuals.
- 3. Violence and Trauma:** In their speeches or resolutions, delegates may reference incidents of violence, trauma, or abuse in real-world scenarios that may potentially be a sensitive topic to delegates in committee.
- 4. Discussions about Discrimination and Marginalization:** Emotionally intense discussions concerning discrimination, marginalization, or inequity may arise during committee.

As you prepare for the conference, we encourage all of our delegates to approach these discussions with both respect and empathy for differing perspectives. If the content of these committees is something that you are uncomfortable with, we recommend that you take the appropriate steps to prioritize your well-being, such as seeking support from conference staff or Secretariat of VTMUNC I.

Bound by the motto *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve), we serve to ensure that we will promote constructive and respectful dialogue during committee sessions. As you prepare and participate in the conference, we promise that VTMUNC I will stay committed to creating a space where all your voices are heard and are welcome.

Thank you for your compassion and cooperation to our goal of respectful and intellectual discourse for all. We hope that as you progress with our conference, you continue to bloom.

Sincerely,

Aaryan Menon, Secretary General of VTMUNC I

Shriya Chemudupati, Under-Secretary General of General Assemblies of VTMUNC I

Madeline Pedersen, Under-Secretary General of Specialized Agencies of VTMUNC I

Juan Camilo Bonilla, Under-Secretary General of Crisis Committees of VTMUNC I



CONFERENCE GUIDELINES

The first iteration of the Virginia Tech Model United Nations Conference, otherwise known as VTMUNC I, is committed to providing a safe and pleasurable experience for all delegates, advisors, and individuals involved with VTMUNC I. Although participating in Model UN is being involved in competitive activity, its fundamental purpose is to uphold and put into practice both the principles of diplomacy, collaboration, and cooperation. Any individual that violates the policies and procedures of VTMUNC I and the ideals of an open and inclusive environment will be subject to disciplinary action from the staff of VTMUNC I; disciplinary action may include a warning or being disqualified from receiving awards. Promoting an environment that is open to all by being safe, equitable, and exhilarating is our utmost priority. In order to ensure this, the following are **prohibited**:

1. Any pre-writing or working on committee content outside of VTMUNC I committee sessions (as described by the Schedule of Program).
2. Any speeches, directives, crisis arcs, or actions in committee that intend to create violence or promote a violent environment to a specific group of people, including mentions of sexual violence, graphic violence, and other behavior that is beyond committee guidelines.
3. Any hate speech, written documents, or behavior that uses language that is discriminatory and disrespectful, including but not limited to any language that is racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic, antisemitic, Islamophobic, or language harmful to any specific group.
4. Any actions that are deliberate, both knowingly and intentionally, to bully, harass, or otherwise harmful behavior that may or has hurt other delegates' physical and or mental health.



Greetings, delegates!

Welcome to VTMUNC I and the AOSIS committee! I am excited and honored to be your chair for this committee. This marks my fifth year participating in Model UN, and I am so excited to help host MUN here in Blacksburg! Model UN helped me greatly to find my closest friends, improve my problem-solving skills, and gain confidence in my speaking and writing. I encourage you to use this committee to step out of your comfort zone. Talk to each other, make friends, write that clause you were thinking of, and stand up to speak even if you're nervous or don't think you have the most fleshed out idea in the room. Building these skills will reward you in so many ways moving forward, and you will, and should, be so proud of all the progress you have made.

Outside of essential MUN skills such as leadership, speaking, and writing, I will also be evaluating your improvement over the weekend and your efforts to put yourself out there. Be kind to one another and allow each other to speak, I will be looking for genuine collaboration amongst blocs. I encourage you to challenge yourself to think about these issues from a non-Western point of view, something we tend to do in Model UN. Do not default to band-aid solutions that only please the Western world, try to really consider the implications of your solutions for the people you are representing as a delegate and be creative.

Introducing myself, my name is Anneli Sample, and I am from Northern Virginia. I am a freshman at Virginia Tech and I am majoring in International Relations. Outside of Model UN, I am also a member of our Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA) chapter and the embroidery club. Besides my extracurriculars, I enjoy listening to music, reading, and playing video games. My favorite artist is Taylor Swift, of course, but I also love artists like boygenius, Gracie Abrams, PinkPantheress, and Red Velvet. As for video games, I'm currently playing through Persona 4. I look forward to getting to know you all!

If you have any questions about committee content, procedure, format, or anything else, feel free to email me at anneli@vt.edu and I will be happy to help! See you in Blacksburg this February!

Sincerely,
Anneli Sample
anneli@vt.edu



Delegates,

This committee will largely follow standard parliamentary procedure, similarly to that of General Assemblies. As per VTMUNC policy, position papers are not required for award eligibility, but are encouraged. Please keep them at a reasonable length and remember to properly cite all information that is not your own. As a reminder, pre-writing anything but your position paper is prohibited. Please review the VTMUNC conference policies for more information and guidelines. It is your responsibility to make sure you understand and adhere to these. For a general guide to position papers and other committee procedures, please visit the “Resources” tab on the VTMUNC website. As stated above, you are welcome to email me with questions about parliamentary procedure and I will be happy to help you. If this is your first time participating in a committee, know that you will quickly catch on once we begin, so please try not to be overwhelmed.

In this committee, you will examine select issues and consider how to address them in the context of small islands and their needs. Additionally, you will consider the consequences of actions taken by the international community on small islands. Many larger countries have the privilege of time to act, but small islands stand to lose the most from the world’s biggest issues due to their low sea levels and small areas. Consider the unique economies and dominant industries of small islands and how they stand to be affected by these issues and certain proposed solutions from the international community.

Warm Regards,
Anneli Sample



Introduction:

The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) is a regional body made up of underrepresented small island states and low-sea-level developing coastal nations, such as Belize. AOSIS's 39 member states make up many of the world's regions, with states in the Caribbean Sea, Pacific Ocean, and the African, Indian Ocean, and the South China Sea (AIS) category. Founded in 1990, AOSIS aims to provide a voice to the voiceless and unify island nations that are too often forgotten and overlooked by the international community. Many issues, such as climate change, disproportionately affect small island nations, despite island nations making up a fraction of the causes of these issues. AOSIS exists to combat these issues by speaking collectively as small island states.¹

¹ "Member States," AOSIS, Accessed October 30, 2023. <https://www.aosis.org/about/member-states/>.

Topic 1: Protecting Exclusive Economic Zones:

Background:

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration defines an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as "...an area of the ocean, generally extending 200 nautical miles (230 miles) beyond a nation's territorial sea, within which a coastal nation has jurisdiction over both living and nonliving resources." This means that countries have exclusive access to things like fishing as well as underwater oil mining in their EEZ. They can loan it out to other countries in the form of permits or grant access for free, but who has access is entirely the state's discretion.²

Small islands rely largely on EEZs, as they are much bigger than the area of the actual island. For example, AOSIS member Nauru's EEZ is 15,000 times the size of its landmass. This gives it much more space and natural resources to take advantage of, promoting development. Many AOSIS states are also Small Island Developing States

² "What is the 'EEZ'?", National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Accessed November 12, 2023. <https://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/facts/useez.html>.

(SIDS) and must use their territories to the fullest to support themselves. EEZs support sovereignty, sustaining the population, and trade through fishing licenses/exports, oil, and minerals.³ Sea levels are rising and disproportionately affecting AOSIS member states, who face a bulk of the effects but create a fraction of the emissions causing climate change and its effects.

With sea levels rising, AOSIS member states are at risk of their landmass decreasing in area, and their EEZs becoming smaller consequently. For countries without a major tourism industry, the fishing or ocean mining industry may be a major factor in sustaining their economy. Additionally, many countries have policies for protecting wildlife and biodiversity within their EEZs. If they were to be redrawn due to territory loss from rising sea levels, much of the ocean would exist without an overseeing body. Both the ocean and islands and their industries will be

harmed if EEZs are redrawn by the international community upon territory loss.

Current Situation:

The rising sea levels create existential problems for small islands, in both a literal sense as they face sinking into the sea, and an economic sense as industries are inhibited. Additionally, they face biodiversity and pollution issues from overfishing and mining. Small islands are urgently trying to find a solution, as the loss of EEZ territory disproportionately affects small islands. For example, Niue is an island home to fewer than 2000 people but has an EEZ the size of Vietnam.⁴ With such a small population and a land area of only about 100 square miles, the profound impact such a large EEZ has on the island cannot be understated. Many small islands rely heavily on the income they generate from their EEZ, and less space to utilize and paying other countries to use their space has a large impact on their

³ “What are the Pacific Islands Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)?” Asia Matters for America, Accessed October 30, 2023.
<https://asiamattersforamerica.org/the-pacific/the-pacific-islands-exclusive-economic-zones-eezs>.

⁴ Monica Evans, “Small island, big ocean: Niue makes its entire EEZ a marine park,” Mongabay, November 3, 2022.
<https://news.mongabay.com/2022/11/small-island-big-ocean-niue-makes-its-entire-eez-a-marine-park/>.

comparatively small GDPs as developing nations.

The destruction of EEZs can impact the fishing industry by redrawing where countries are allowed to fish. For example, many countries sell fishing licenses for outside entities to fish in their territory. If this goes away due to redrawing boundaries, according to Asia Matters for America up to 98% of some governments' revenue is gone.⁵ Additionally, there would be no legitimate regulation, likely leading to overfishing. The competition for natural resources is also expected to rise, for example, oil drilling in the oceans no longer being regulated to these EEZs.⁶ With competition rising, consumers will buy the most convenient option, which may not be a remote small island, triggering a sharp income decline in small islands. There is little incentive to buy natural resources

from remote, developing islands if developed countries have access to the same resources for lower prices. For countries attempting to diversify their economies to promote sustainable development, a failure in their largest sectors is a severe setback in their long-term goals.

Additionally, the opening of the various reefs and fishing areas in EEZs to the international community poses the threat of overconsumption and overfishing, which could permanently damage the ecosystems and further the economic depressions caused by EEZ redraws. If, for example, oil mining were to pollute the waters that used to be a country's territory and are now adjacent to their EEZ, they would be unable to use even their reduced amount of space. The issue of EEZ use and changes are not just economic, but also environmental.

The international community has largely ignored the voices of Small Island States, which is why AOSIS exists to amplify their voices as one. AOSIS has begun to bring this issue to the UN, which has discussed it, but little action has been taken yet. Thus,

⁵ "What Are the Pacific Islands Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)?"

⁶ Alister Doyle, "Islands, rocks and tuna: Pacific nations draw new battle lines against rising seas," Reuters, March 10, 2021.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-pacific-fishing-trfn/islands-rocks-and-tuna-pacific-nations-draw-new-battle-lines-against-rising-seas-idUSKBN2B3054>.

many countries have been forced to take action at the national and regional level due to being ignored by larger countries that are not affected as much.

Past Actions:

AOSIS advocates for the protection of maritime zones especially amid sea level rising from climate change, and has signed a treaty stating that EEZs will remain the same even if territory is lost and international law constitutes redrawing EEZs.⁷ Time will tell if this treaty will have legitimacy in the international community at large in the event of sea levels rising. AOSIS asserts that within their borders, countries have much they can do to protect their EEZs and use them to the fullest extent. The UN supports this treaty and acknowledges the threat Small Islands face with being unable to access their resources due to rising sea levels destroying infrastructure and redrawing EEZs.

⁷“Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization (AALCO) Invite you to a Virtual Informal Discussion on Why it is Urgent to Register and Publish Maritime Zone Information in View of Rising Seas,” United Nations, Accessed October 30, 2023. https://www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/76/pdfs/events/29_october_2021_2.pdf

Additionally, the UN acknowledges that many of the protections and infrastructure these islands need to withstand losses of economic zones and increased competition for natural resources are out of their budget as they are developing and small.⁸

The UN has, thus far, not passed concrete legislation surrounding this issue. Plans have been made to promote economic development, which would reduce dependency on EEZs, but nothing has been done specifically. The UN has passed many climate mitigation measures, such as the Kyoto Protocol, but the SIDS are largely advocating for themselves when it comes to this issue.⁹ The UN needs to focus more on this issue specifically to protect the global economy and the millions of people living on small islands.

At the local and regional levels, small islands have many policies in place to protect

⁸“Climate Change-induced Sea-Level Rise Direct Threat to Millions around World, Secretary-General Tells Security Council,” United Nations, February 14, 2023. <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15199.doc.htm>.

⁹Nemat, Sadat, “Small Islands, Rising Seas,” United Nations, Accessed October 30, 2023. <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/small-islands-rising-seas>.

their natural resources and preserve their EEZs by monetizing them, protecting wildlife, and using green energy to reduce carbon emissions that are causing the threat in the first place. Additionally, countries are implementing policies that reduce dependency on EEZs, mitigating economic catastrophe should EEZs be redrawn. For example, the island of Niue dedicates about 40% of its EEZ to marine conservation where no fishing, mining, or oil/mineral exploration is allowed, while the rest can be paid to use by the international community. This, coupled with the treaty keeping EEZs consistent, allows Niue to continue to support itself even in the event of overfishing or rising sea levels.¹⁰ Similarly, Palau has dedicated 80% of its EEZ to be no-take. Many states are working together on this issue, with states such as Micronesia, Guam, and the Marshall Islands collaborating to conserve natural

resources and protect the surrounding environment to stimulate the economy.¹¹

The global economy will face many issues without a solution. The collapse of the tropical fishing industry and undersea oil and mineral harvesting would have ripple effects on the greater global economy. Not only would countries struggle to take all the refugees that would come from these small countries if their economies were to fail, but they would also see decreases in their profit and environmental repercussions.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can the biodiversity of EEZs be protected when fishing remains a dominant industry for many Small Island Developing States (SIDS)?
 - a. What alternatives do countries have if their economy is sustained by the use of the ocean?
 - b. How can their economies be diversified to promote

¹⁰ Monica Evans, "Small island, big ocean: Niue makes its entire EEZ a marine park," Mongabay, November 3, 2022.
<https://news.mongabay.com/2022/11/small-island-big-ocean-niue-makes-its-entire-eez-a-marine-park/>.

¹¹ "Leaders Make Visionary Commitments to Island Sustainability and Resilience," AOSIS, Accessed October 30, 2023.
<https://www.aosis.org/leaders-make-visionary-commitments-to-island-sustainability-and-resilience/>.

development and reduce
dependency?

2. How can the sovereignty of EEZs be upheld, especially in the wake of rising sea levels redrawing borders?
3. How can Small Islands ensure that if sea levels rise, their EEZs and livelihoods will remain consistent?

Topic II: Uplifting Sustainable Tourism

Background:

With the globalization of the world, many places that were impossible for leisure travel are now accessible through flight. This creates an opportunity to help or hurt development. With tourism making up a majority of many SIDS' GDPs, it is important to make sure tourism is sustainable both environmentally and economically. Thus, tourism can either uplift or destroy an island's development. On the positive side, local jobs are created and investment from foreign countries stimulates the economy, but negatively, it can have devastating effects on the environment and the local, rich cultures of islands.¹² SIDS want to preserve the beauty of the islands, while also utilizing tourism as a means of economic growth.

The local and international impacts of the tourism industry cannot be understated, they sustain the economy almost fully in some countries. On the global scale, tourism in SIDS includes tens of millions of

¹² "Small Island Developing States," Sustainable Travel, Accessed October 31, 2023.
<https://sustainabletravel.org/small-islands/>.

travelers and Western companies like cruise lines are dependent on small islands still existing and being beautiful to sustain their profits. This partnership incentivizes taking action for both sides, but also presents a new challenge as both parties want different things in many cases. Compromises will have to be made with consideration of future impacts we do not yet see the effects of.

It is also important to consider the effects of Western tourism companies in non-Western spaces and their effects on both the profits that locals see and the local cultures. The commodification of cultures indigenous to the lands toured runs rampant. Cultural traditions can easily become theatrical and water down authentic cultural displays to meet the demands of the Western world.¹³

Current Situation:

There are three challenges unique to SIDS that make it difficult to restructure the tourism industry without economic losses.

¹³ Maysa Shahateet, "Finding Balance: Cultural Preservation and Tourism," Chemonics, November 28, 2017.
<https://chemonics.com/blog/finding-balance-cultural-preservation-tourism/>.

The first challenge is economic dependency. For many SIDS, tourism makes up a majority of their GDP. This means cuts to make tourism more sustainable could mean fewer tourists and less profit. Secondly, transportation to isolated islands is often very wasteful. People take long flights and boat rides to get to these destinations, and these are very destructive to the environment. Cruise ships in particular cause a lot of damage, disproportionately to small islands. Finally, small islands are very reliant on imports for materials that do not naturally occur on the island. This means that costs could go up in an instant, cutting into other industries.¹⁴ These issues mean SIDS need changes to the tourism industry more than anyone, but will also suffer the most from policy changes with unintended effects.

If visitors are deterred from visiting SIDS due to higher costs, loss of beauty, loss of authenticity, etc., many states will see an unprecedented loss in income. Despite these

¹⁴“Three unique challenges to sustainable tourism in islands,” Acorn Tourism, September 20, 2021. <https://acorntourism.co.uk/insights/blog/read/2021/09/three-unique-challenges-to-sustainable-tourism-in-islands-b52>.

risks, it is also very important to make changes to the tourism industry to make it sustainable before it is too late. Companies such as cruise lines may be more hesitant to accept changes that make their voyages more expensive, so a solution that works for all parties must be drawn up. The islands and their industries must be protected without retroactively giving cruise lines a reason to invest in and travel to other islands. With several cruise lines having private resort islands of their own, such as Disney’s Castaway Cay,¹⁵ they have reason to walk away from their investments in local economies in favor of their own islands that do not need to employ locals, follow their rules, pay their fines, and uplift their cultures if demands become too strenuous and costly.

Past Action:

AOSIS has stated that these threats are of utmost importance to them and that there is a need for new regulations on things like waste management, especially on cruise ships. They also acknowledge that measures

¹⁵“Disney Castaway Cay,” Disney, Accessed 1 December, 2023. <https://disneycruise.disney.go.com/ports/castaway-cay/>.

taken that work for the rest of the world, such as fossil fuel taxes, affect SIDS the most due to their isolated locations. This leaves them in a unique position where these protections help their islands to continue existing in the threat of rising sea levels but may end up harming the economy at large. They also state that it is hard to make the necessary restructures to the tourism industry when there is a lack of data to go off of.¹⁶ Additionally, AOSIS passed the Blueprint for Ocean and Coastal Sustainability. This document detailed what AOSIS asks for regarding ocean management to protect tourism. It asserts that for islands, the ocean is not just a resource, it is the economy, culture, and home of the people.¹⁷

The UN supports the points AOSIS raises and emphasizes the need for collaboration between both big businesses and local professions like farmers and

fishermen. This, they say, will lead to a “win-win situation” that also keeps the involvement of local businesses high while also leaving room for the economy to grow through tourism.¹⁸ The UN has not given the issue of tourism significant time for discussion and planning, leaving SIDS at risk of being negatively affected by resolutions for sustainable tourism due to economic costs if they do pass, and threatened by climate change and culture erasure if they do not. The UN needs to work with both SIDS and travel companies to agree on what would be most environmentally and developmentally effective for islands. Both extremes leave islands in a tough spot, so something in the middle is required to keep islands economically growing while not being threatened by the environment.

Many AOSIS member states have taken action at the national and regional levels concerning this issue. In the wake of the pandemic, countries such as Dominica and

¹⁶“AOSIS Proposes path forward for tourism recovery,” AOSIS, May 4, 2023.
<https://www.aosis.org/aosis-proposes-path-forward-for-tourism-recovery-for-sids/>.

¹⁷“Blueprint for Ocean and Coastal Sustainability,” AOSIS, November 11, 2011.
<https://www.aosis.org/blueprint-for-ocean-and-coastal-sustainability/>.

¹⁸“SIDS GBN - Thematic Areas - Sustainable Tourism,” United Nations, Accessed October 31, 2023.
<https://www.un.org/ohrlls/sids-gbn-thematic-areas-sustainable-tourism>.

Grenada have worked on giving surveys to local tourism businesses to remedy the lack of data on tourism that inhibits change. Additionally, they have assessed present and possible future policies, and infrastructure, and given workshops on sustainability in tourism. These revealed that there was concern among businesses about the deteriorating beaches and reefs, and gave valuable data about the demographics of visiting tourists in terms of their reasons for visiting. This could help countries choose what to prioritize in policymaking.¹⁹ Jamaica created one of the largest wind farms in the Caribbean, powering tens of thousands of homes and tourist accommodations, with hopes to do this all over the country.²⁰

AOSIS continues to strive to meet the goal of carbon neutrality in tourism by 2050. They also call for an elimination of single-use plastics in tourism as well as waste management regulations to protect the

biodiversity in and around islands. They also emphasize the importance of considering how the regulations the Western world may pass without a second thought can affect islands disproportionately. AOSIS is enthusiastic about working with the UN, specifically, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the World Tourism Organization (WTO), and various other bodies.²¹

The collapse of the island tourism industry would lead to the stagnation of development in countries making up millions of people within their populations, as well as negatively impacting biodiversity and the Western tourism industry. Tour companies and cruise lines would have a large decrease in where they can go and the amount of tourists they can have. This means it is of utmost importance to create a solution that appeases all parties.

¹⁹“OECS Blue Economy Tourism Analytics,” Acorn Tourism, Accessed October 31, 2023. <https://acorn-tourism.co.uk/projects/oecs-blue-economy-tourism-analytics-p677261>.

²⁰“Jamaica Leads the Revolution in Caribbean Climate Change,” AOSIS, Accessed October 31, 2023.

²¹Conrod Hunte, “Sustainable Recovery of the Tourism Industry at the SIDS Global Business Network Forum,” AOSIS, April 12, 2022. <https://www.aosis.org/sustainable-recovery-of-the-tourism-industry-at-the-sids-global-business-network-forum/>.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can local industries be uplifted when large, foreign corporations dominate the tourism industry?
2. How does tourism impact developing nations? Is tourism always good for development?
3. How can tourism impact the cost of living and resource availability to locals?
4. How does tourism impact sacred traditions on small island states?

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