



Solomon Islands Statement

by

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Prime Minister

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General Debate

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Mr. President,

Permit me to add the congratulations of my Delegation to those of other Distinguished colleagues on your election as President of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Your great experience and wisdom as a diplomat will guide our work going forward in this session. I assure you that my delegation will, for its part, try to lighten your burden by giving you the fullest cooperation throughout the proceedings of this august Assembly.

For your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson, what can I say?

Not only was he Fiji's first President of a Session of our General Assembly but he was also the first Pacific Islander to assume that prestigious office. Among his many achievements was his championing of the 1,350 voluntary commitments made at the UN Ocean Conference held here in June. Allow me to thank the out-going President, Mr. Thomson, for a marvellous job done.

Mr. President,

Our world is going through difficult times. 2017 has been a year dominated by intentional provocation and natural disasters. As such, the decision to design our Theme "*Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet*" is not only appropriate but indeed perfectly timed.

On this note, may I, on behalf of the People of Solomon Islands, extend our heartfelt sympathies to those affected by the recent natural disasters, in particular Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria. We extend our sympathies to the families who have lost loved ones in the

recent earthquakes in Mexico (*Mehiko*). Whether it be tsunamis, cyclones, flooding or earthquakes, the Solomon Islands knows well the pain of having to live through such ordeals. Our hearts and prayers are with you.

Mr President

I believe that the theme can effectively be summed up in three words; “peace, humanity and equality”.

However, I am afraid, that the current status quo in the world today does not reflect those simple yet powerful words.

Mr President,

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, approximately 65.6 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of last year. These statistics are the result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations – consequences of human actions.

Sadly, the majority of these displaced people are women and children.

They are the most vulnerable to the evil designs of fellow human beings. They must therefore be protected. The protection of people is in the DNA of this organization.

My government therefore reaffirms its support for the Responsibility to Protect. The international community must continue to stand firm in our fight to prevent crimes against humanity.

Mr President,

I stand here with pride in saying that, today we in the Pacific continue to enjoy the world's most peaceful corner. Whilst we play a minor role in the geo-politics of this World, we are now once again caught up in the midst of global power play.

Mr President,

History shows that global events have often dictated those in the Pacific region. These were events beyond our control that were imposed upon us. These events have had lasting impacts on our peoples; Many of them negative.

From bygone World Wars to Nuclear Tests to current instances of military provocation, we continue to deal with the remnants of these foreign imposed events.

Mr President,

For us in Solomon Islands, it was only a month ago that we celebrated 75 Years of the Anniversary of the Battle of Guadalcanal; a significant battle during the second world war. For many, World War II ended in 1945, but for us its remnants still remain.

In the period between 2011 - 2017, approximately 37,000 unexploded ordnances weighing some 152,000 metric tons were destroyed. I thank the Governments of Australia and the United States of America for their assistance in this exercise. That exercise continues today.

Mr President

Again today, we are continually threatened by global power posturing that yet again attempts to dictate our fate as a region.

But today, we refuse to remain silent and it is on this note that I would like to register our strongest condemnation of the actions by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We too would like to echo the global call on DPRK to abide by the United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

Mr. President,

The recent testing of ballistic missiles by DPRK over the Pacific Ocean is an insult to the people of the Pacific.

We are ocean people. The sea is our sanctuary. It is the foundation of our heritage. It is where our people source their food and income. Therefore, we denounce any pollution and contamination of our ocean that our Pacific peoples depend on for our livelihoods.

Mr President,

As you are well aware, we in the Pacific supply approximately 60% of the world's tuna market. This underscores the global significance of our region. Therefore, maintaining the health of our ocean is not only for the sake of our self-interest. The maintenance of our ocean, given its importance to global food security, should be in all our interest.

As such, Solomon Islands reaffirms the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea for the peaceful use of the ocean spaces.

Mr President,

Whilst the threat of Nuclear Warfare is a genuine concern to us all, for us Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the impacts of climate change currently occurring at an alarming rate on our shores, presents a clear and present danger.

Further to the above, ocean acidification now stands at 400 part per million carbon dioxide concentration, it has gone past safe level of 350 parts per million and soon it will begin to dissolve our corals at 550 parts per million.

Mr President,

For us Pacific Island Nations, Climate change continues to be our enemy. We are continuously invaded by this enemy every day.

In Solomon Islands, Mr President, we have lost 6 islands due to the effects of climate change. What was once a playing ground for children to play, is now inundated with water. For many of our peoples, talk of a sustainable world is becoming increasingly unattainable. We are in survival mode.

The horrors of the impact of a nuclear attack is undeniable but the slow onset, caused by the adverse impact of climate change is just as cruel.

Mr. President,

If it's not happening yet, it shortly will. An unstable climate and the subsequent displacement and relocation of people can exacerbate some of the core drivers of conflict – such as migratory pressures, clash of cultures and competition for resources. These are threats to the very existence of humanity and could very well morph into threats to global peace and security. That is why the Pacific Small Island Developing States have been requesting the Security Council to also address the issue of climate change.

Mr President,

The building of sea walls and wave breakers, to mitigate some of the impacts caused by climate change, while useful is nothing more but a mere band-aid solution. We call on all major emitters to meet their National Determined Contributions (NDCs) in reducing greenhouse emissions. We strongly urge the United States of America to reconsider its position on the Paris Climate Accord. Let us all stand together in solidarity to face the defining challenge of our time.

On COP23, Solomon Islands pledges its full support to Fiji as Chair. As a fellow Pacific Island country, we congratulate Fiji for your upcoming assumption of the Chairmanship and look forward to discussions on the effective implementation of Paris Climate Accord.

Mr. President,

On peace and security, Solomon Islands contributed a contingent of 5 Police Officers that had just completed their 12 months Tour of Duty in the United Nations African Mission in Dafur (UNAMID). This is Solomon Islands' first humble contribution to the maintenance of world peace.

Another 8 Police Officers, two of whom are women officers, are all set to go as soon as they secure their visas for Sudan. UNAMID was set up to protect civilians in Dafur where militia groups continue to be active and inter-communal violence still occurs. Work here could be made more effective if the UN's Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes is integrated into the pre-deployment and in-theatre training for all peacekeepers.

Mr President,

The mandate of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, fondly known as RAMSI, ended on June 30, 2017. On behalf of the People of Solomon Islands, I sincerely thank members of the Pacific Islands Forum for coming to our aid, to save us from ourselves. On this juncture, I would like to pay tribute to those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice during the mission and thank their families for their loved ones' services.

I also would extend to Australia and New Zealand our deepest gratitude for their excellent leadership role in RAMSI.

RAMSI was premised on a regional security framework: the Biketawa Declaration. My Government is also very supportive of the Pacific Islands Leaders Communique from the 48th Forum Meeting calling for a comprehensive expansion and updating of the Biketawa Declaration. We believe that a Biketawa Plus that takes into consideration the security challenges the region faces today, as well as our collective responses to them, will contribute towards keeping the Pacific Islands region peaceful.

Mr. President,

Like other post-conflict countries, Solomon Islands will continue to face many challenges. Sustainable peace will require more than just effective policing or a functioning public service. It will require social and economic development initiatives that address the underlying causes of the conflict. Here I must thank the Peacebuilding Commission for facilitating our National Dialogue on Peace and Sustainable Development.

The Communique from this Dialogue clearly shows an inclusive and clear consensus on our priorities for sustaining peace. I therefore look forward for Solomon Islands to be formally declared eligible for peacebuilding support from the Peacebuilding Recovery Facility.

I must also thank the Board of the Green Climate Fund for approving 86 million US dollars for the Tina Hydro Project when it met in South Korea early this year. The project will create more than 200 jobs and will offset more than 44,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide per annum in diesel emissions. It will also provide renewable energy, at a more affordable cost, to more than 100,000 people in and around our capital city of Honiara.

Mr. President,

I have an issue here with the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf on the Ontong Java Plateau (OJP) jointly submitted by Papua New Guinea, the Federated States of Micronesia and Solomon Islands. Solomon Islands notes, with serious concerns, that the Commission, in its deliberation, has overturned the understanding we had reached with the Sub-Commission. And this concerns the connection of Duff and Anuta Islands to the continental margin of the OJP.

The Sub-Commission and our Joint Delegations reached mutually acceptable conclusions as a result of comprehensive interactions over two years. But we were not given the opportunity to address the amendments proposed by the Commission despite their serious implications for our Submission. Nor were we given the reasons for the amendments despite our repeated requests. We therefore have no other option but to consider making a revised submission.

A related issue is the negotiations on an implementing agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdictions. The current negotiations undermine the fundamental principles embodied in the UN Charter and are grossly inadequate when addressing the

principle of adjacency, integration of traditional knowledge, transboundary and cumulative impacts as they relate to Small Island Developing States. There must also be some recognition for a funding mechanism that can adequately support the implementation of the proposed instrument.

Mr. President,

The preamble of the UN Charter speaks powerfully of our mission to ‘reaffirm faith in the fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.’ This language clearly articulates the principle of universality, for all peoples and all nations regardless of their size and population.

However, as we in this august Assembly speak of “leaving no one behind,” we are at the same time shutting the door to the people of Taiwan from participating in this universal process. We are therefore contradicting our own principles by leaving 23 million people behind. And yet the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda requires global partnership and the joint efforts of all stakeholders to mobilize all available resources. Taiwan is ready, willing and able to engage in and contribute to the wide range of substantive UN programmes for the welfare of humanity. If we are to focus on people Let’s give Taiwan and its 23 million people a chance. If we are to promote peace and sustainability, let’s give Taiwan and its 23 million people a chance.

Let us not contradict the principles that the United Nations was established to represent and allow the rules to change subject to whose best interests are at stake.

Taiwan has been actively involved in UN programs and specialised UN Agencies. Despite the contributions of Taiwan towards the well-being of the citizens of the world, we continue to ignore the right of Taiwan to self-determination, as such, it is high time that this august body give due recognition to Taiwan as a legitimate member of the Family of Nations.

Mr. President,

Article 73 of our Charter also speaks powerfully on fundamental human rights and in its 1960 'Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples', the UN General Assembly stated that "the subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to world peace and cooperation".

Thanks to this Article the people of New Caledonia will have a referendum in 2018 where they can finally decide, without fear or favour, on their political future. I wish them all the best. I must thank and commend the Administering power for working closely with the Committee of 24 on the issue of New Caledonia. I hope the same level of co-operation will also be shown on French Polynesia and that a C24 visit will occur soon.

Mr President,

Solomon Islands position on the aforementioned issues are premised on principles that we have consistently upheld. In this connection, Solomon Islands condemns the consistent human rights violations in West Papua.

Our Sustainable Development Goals that promote the notion of “no-one left behind” is synonymous to empty promises unless we, in the United Nations, take active steps to address the plight of the peoples of West Papua.

Indeed, we have left them behind some 50 years ago when we, as a Family of Nations, noted their plight without much to add. Since then, the peoples of West Papua were never allowed the proper act of self-determination guaranteed by the inalienable right to self-determination as expressed in UN human rights Covenants. Only international action -- by individual countries and from the leading organizational bodies of the international system, especially the United Nations General Assembly – can pave the way for the recognition of a people whose right to self-determination had been denied for nearly fifty years ago. Failing this, we as a Family of Nations will become complicit in perpetuating the suffering and being blind to the injustice; missing yet another golden opportunity to remain true to the saying of “leaving no-one behind.

At the 71st session, a group of Pacific Island nations called for this august body to address the human rights violations in West Papua. Today, I stand on behalf of my people and those in the Pacific region to reiterate that same call on this august body to address the plight of West Papuan women, children and men.

Our people are watching, West Papuans inside West Papua are watching, praying and are hoping for a brighter future. They have come in numbers to express their hope for a better future. We as leaders have this responsibility of “leaving NO-ONE BEHIND”.

I would therefore encourage Indonesia to engage in more constructive dialogue, including with West Papua to find a way forward in addressing the aspirations of the people of West Papua. I urge the UN to proactively engage in these dialogues as well.

Mr. President,

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights worldwide – my country and region included. Violence against women is an obstacle to gender equality in economic opportunities and livelihoods. The final Pacific Regional Millennium Development Tracking Report published in 2015, highlighted that violence against women was an impediment to achieving the MDGs. If our region is to achieve the SDGs we will need to intensify efforts, and increase support and cooperation to end violence against women and girls.

The Solomon Islands Family Protection Act 2014, was a national response to this urgent need to curtail the increasing rate of family violence. It was to ensure that homes in Solomon Islands, as important units of the community, are peaceful and safe for all members of a family. The Act covers any type of abuse that happens in the home between perpetrators and victims of domestic violence. Yes, we have made big strides in not just counting women but more importantly in making women count.

Mr. President,

As a Small Island Developing State and Least Developed Country with inherent structural capacity constraints, we greatly rely on the United Nations system to support and augment our national efforts in implementing national development programs.

It is our hope that this expectation is met by concrete and measurable deliverables on the ground by our UN partners.

My delegation welcomes the Secretary-General's reform agenda and applauds his vision to reposition sustainable development at the heart of the United Nations. It's guiding framework, the 2030 Agenda, with its pledge to leave no one behind, is indeed our boldest agenda for humanity. For my country, this bold agenda will have to include fair representation in the recruitment of staff to the UN Secretariat. Despite only having one national at the UN Secretariat, we have not been invited to sit the young professional's exams for two years in a row now. We nevertheless remain steadfast in our support and encouragement of action for a strong and effective United Nations and we stand ready to support the Secretary-General's noble efforts in transforming the Organisation, including the Security Council.

Mr. President,

The UN is still the town hall of our global village. People know what it does but don't see much value in it. It is inevitably imperfect.

As the organization's second Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold, famously said "the UN was not created to take humanity to heaven but to save it from hell". Its imperfections, however, only mean that we need to work harder to make it better. Let's do it!

Thank you Mr. President.
