

Statement of

HIS MAJESTY KING TUPOU VI

SOVEREIGN AND HEAD OF STATE OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA

on the occasion of the

General Debate

at the Seventy-second Session

of the United Nations General Assembly

Friday, 22nd September 2017

United Nations Headquarters, New York

Mr. President,

I congratulate you on the assumption of your presidency of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly and I assure you that the Tonga delegation will fully support your able leadership in revitalizing and enhancing the crucial role of this august Organization.

I express gratitude to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson, a distinguished son of the Pacific Islands Region, with progressing the implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda and successfully convening the inaugural Ocean Conference this year.

I also commend His Excellency Mr. António Guterres the United Nations Secretary-General, for the sterling stewardship since the beginning of his first year at the helm. The Tonga delegation will fully support your important reform work.

We send our message of solidarity and sympathy to the people of Mexico, their families and friends affected by the devastating earthquake and; to the millions of people in the Caribbean and all those affected in recent weeks by the utter ravages of successive hurricanes.

Mr. President,

My delegation and I welcome your timely and relevant theme: “Focusing on people: striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet.” It essentially emphasizes the peaceful wellbeing of all people and the conservation and sustainable use of our global resources for present and future generations. Implementation is therefore crucial through sincere partnerships to collectively achieve the targets, goals and objectives stipulated under international law and internationally agreed outcomes.

In contributing towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the international agreed blueprint for the sustainable development of small island developing States (SIDS), the SAMOA Pathway, Tonga has established a *National Monitoring Mechanism*. In this regard, we wish to acknowledge the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2013-2017 will conclude at the end of this year. Subsequently, the 5-year programme cycle entitled United Nations Pacific Strategy (UNPS) 2018-2022 for 14 Pacific Island Countries, which was signed in August 2017 at the UNDP Pacific Office, will commence.

The close partnership between the Government of Tonga and the United Nations System to effectively implement the integrated Tonga Strategic Development Framework and the Agenda 2030 is reinforced through the coordination of UNPS 2018-2022 by the United Nations Joint Presence Office Delivering as One, which is led by the UNDP in Tonga. It is strategically positioned to provide technical advice to the Government, NGOs, Civil Society, and the Private Sector.

We also note the new senior management appointments by the UN Secretary-General. We welcome the appointment of the first woman from Tonga and the Pacific Islands Region to shepherd the important advocacy and facilitation work in the years ahead of the Office for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. We fully support the goal of gender parity, including at all levels in the United Nations Organization.

Mr. President,

The 2017 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) enabled the review of 7 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in particular: *Goals 3*, on Good health and well-being; *5*, on Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and *14*, on the Ocean and its resources. We commend the President of the Economic and Social Council for his initiative to devote adequate time to underscore and examine the complex sustainability challenges facing SIDS, as a Special Case, and thereby enhance efforts to implement the commitments called for in the SAMOA Pathway. The High Level Political Forum remains an important means for the follow-up, monitoring, and accountability of commitments to SIDS, which are essentially linked to the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

Mr. President,

We fully support Fiji's Presidency of the 23rd Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change this year, to strongly address the adverse impacts of Climate Change and urgent need for innovation in Adaptation for SIDS.

We note the role of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Asia Development Bank in availing disaster finance and respective financial tools to all SIDS.

While acknowledging their work on expanding the definition of "*fragility*", we urge further refinement of operational financing decisions to include the drivers of vulnerability experienced in the Pacific Islands region, particularly natural disasters and adverse economic shocks.

We reiterate our call for the appointment of a Special Representative on Climate and Security to ensure that the UN System has the appropriate tools to respond effectively and efficiently to Climate Change as an existential threat and a mounting security challenge for SIDS and the entire international community.

Mr. President,

Enhanced accessibility to modern and clean sustainable energy services, energy efficiency, and the use of economically viable and environmentally sound technology and research, play a critical role in our sustainable development. Mitigation efforts are also essential to overcome the challenges of excess dependence on imported fossil fuels.

To further strengthen international and regional cooperation, the Pacific Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (PCREEE) was established in Tonga in April of this year. The Centre provides valuable support to Pacific Island countries and territories towards progressing their respective priorities and commitments for achieving sustainable energy and contributing to SDGs 7, 9 and 13. It is a partnership between the Pacific Community, the Government of Austria, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, and SIDS-DOCK, amongst others.

The General Assembly acknowledged the PCREEE upon adoption of the biennial resolution entitled: ‘*Cooperation between the United Nations and the Pacific Islands Forum*’ in July this year.

Mr. President,

However, we have, and continue to, experience the negative impacts of ocean degradation to our livelihoods and culture due to the anthropogenic activities and inter-related devastating effects of climate change. We already actively contribute to the implementation of SDG 14 and look forward to a strong collaboration with all interested parties. We hosted this year an international whaling meeting. The farsighted 1978 Royal Decree by His Majesty the Late King Tupou IV already banned whaling in Tongan waters. This farsighted decree was issued four years before the international ban on whale hunting came into effect.

This was re-affirmed during the April 2017 International Conference on Whales in a Changing Ocean we were honored to host.

We may be a Small Island State but all SIDS are large Ocean States.

To us and our people, successful implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 is critical for the pathway towards sustainable development and its inter-connection with achieving other goals such as those related to food security, water and sanitation, health, economic growth, and sustainable production and consumption. Strong political will for a whole-of-government approach, towards mainstreaming ocean-related actions from international, regional, and national development plans and strategies, will ensure the inclusive participation and efforts of all stakeholders including local communities and the private sector.

Tonga joined the international community in endorsing the “*Call for Action*” outcome document of the Ocean Conference in June that contains almost 1400 voluntary commitments by stakeholders including 8 from Tonga.

It is a basis for the development of a blue economy or a Blue Charter as proposed by the Commonwealth Secretariat. There is urgency to develop practical guidelines and toolkits to assist States in delivering on all targets under Goal 14 in an integrated manner.

Mr. President,

We acknowledge the completion of the work of the preparatory committee on the development of a legally binding instrument under the UNCLOS for the conservation and sustainable use of the biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Tonga maintains its support for the early commencement of an intergovernmental conference to initiate negotiations on a substantive text.

We embrace the ongoing work of the International Seabed Authority in its administration and management of resources in the 'Area' in accordance with the '*Common Heritage of Mankind*'. Tonga congratulates the Secretary-General of the Authority in his first year in office, as he works with member states to develop the important exploitation regulations which must strike the appropriate balance between the conservation of the natural environment in which mineral resources exist, and its sustainable use. Consultations must be transparent and inclusive to ensure this balance is achieved. Tonga continues its engagement as a member state of the Authority and is seeking re-election to the Council at the 24th Session of the Authority in 2018. A Tongan national with other members of the Legal and Technical Commission, provide expert views to facilitate the work of the Commission in developing the important financial mechanism to ensure fair and equitable distribution of returns from seabed mining.

Mr. President,

Tonga reiterates the call made under the SAMOA Pathway for genuine and durable partnerships to ensure no one is left behind. A very credible partnership mechanism between the 12 Pacific SIDS and Italy, Austria, Luxembourg, and Spain is exemplified through the Joint Committee. It has been ably co-chaired by Italy and the Chair of the Pacific SIDS throughout each year since 2006. Tonga has thus benefitted through projects related to renewable energy, water, capacity-strengthening of young Government officials and more recently, marine protected areas.

We welcome the establishment of the India-United Nations Development Fund through the UN Office for South-South Cooperation, which launched a project implemented by the UNDP for the establishment of early warning systems in Tonga and other Pacific Island Countries. The system relies on the timely provision of disaster risk information, guidance on how to act upon warnings, and ensuring a constant state of preparedness.

Sustainable development is possible where there is peace and security and sustainable development is key to peace and security. Finally, we urge all Leaders to focus and reflect on how best their power and legitimacy will benefit their own people and the entire world.

We appeal for a speedy resolution to the current tensions in the Korean Peninsula that is affecting Global Peace and Security.

I congratulate the UN Secretary-General for the recent establishment of the High Level Advisory Board on Mediation to advise him on specific initiatives and related efforts around the world.

Mr. President,

May the Almighty God guide and bless you and all the member-states of the United Nations and their respective Governments and people.

Thank you.

TUPOU VI