



National Statement

Presented remotely by

PRIME MINISTER OF TUVALU

Honourable Mr. Kausea Natano

at

The 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

General Debate

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New York

UNGA76 Theme: Building Resilience through hope – to recover from covid19, rebuild sustainably, respond to the needs of the planet, respect the rights of people, and revitalize the United Nations.

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the General Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

1. On behalf of the Government of Tuvalu, I congratulate you on your election as President of the 76th United Nations General Assembly. Tuvalu has full confidence in your presidency. Let me also take this opportunity to thank the president of our 75th session, H.E. Volkan Bozkir, for a successful session under his leadership, despite the challenges to the work of the General Assembly due to the covid19 pandemic.
2. I also want to express Tuvalu's solidarity with Secretary General, Antonio Guterres for his steadfast leadership in guiding this august body in unprecedented and difficult times given the covid19 pandemic and ongoing conflicts in many parts of the world.

Mr. President,

Theme of UNGA76.

3. I applaud your theme for the 76th Session of the General Assembly. We are yet again reminded that, since the Millennium Development Goals, and now the Sustainable Development Goals, we are not on track on the sustainable development targets we set for ourselves. Two things are clear from the theme. That is, we cannot build resilient and sustainable economies in isolation of, first, the needs of the planet, and, second, the protection of human rights.
4. Tuvalu, with an average land elevation of no more than 2 meters above sea level, is extremely vulnerable to climate change, sea level rise, and natural disasters. How strong will the next tropical cyclone be? How much longer can our islands support our livelihoods? Is there even a future for us on our islands?
5. With forced displacement due to climate change and sea level rise, what shall we do and where should we go? What about our traditional culture and heritage? What will happen to us? What happens to our human rights? Will Tuvalu remain a member state of the UN if it is finally submerged? Who can help us, and will they help us?

Mr. President,

6. These are the valid but difficult moral and political questions we, and millions of people in low lying countries and coastal areas, continue to grapple with. Consequently, these same difficult questions will be asked by those of us who remain ignorant of climate change. Until we have answers to these difficult questions, sustainable development, for us, will only be wishful thinking and a short-term goal running on borrowed time. Not a reality we can accomplish.

7. But hope is not all lost. For Tuvalu, we will cope and adapt. Statelessness is not an option for Tuvalu, and I am sure it is also not an option for any of us here today. The international community must now consider solutions to protect the rights of people affected by the impacts of climate change and to avoid chaotic responses to uncontrolled mass climate displacement.

8. In this regard, Tuvalu is spearheading a new initiative that will be advanced by likeminded countries to advance efforts towards protecting the statehood of small atoll island nations facing existential threats from sea level rise and, preserving the sovereignty, rights and heritage of affected nations and their populations.

9. On the domestic front, we have streamlined building resilience to climate change, natural disasters, and external shocks into our 10 year national sustainable development strategy namely, *Te Kete 2021 - 2030*. We have continued to enhance adaptation to climate change and sea level rise through the construction of raised reclamation and coastal protection systems and adopting new agricultural systems to respond to climate change and sea level rise.

10. We are grateful for the assistance provided through the Green Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility (GEF), World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and other development partners to enhance our resilience to climate change. However, we must scale up this support to meet our growing adaptation needs, particularly our major development programmes such as land reclamation and land elevation, to strengthen our resilience to the slow onset of sea level rise which could potentially erase our God-given land from the face of the Earth.

Mr. President,

11. The cost of continuous rebuilding after every tropical cyclone and adapting to increasing sea levels leaves little fiscal space for investment in the SDGs. Our global climate actions must focus on the root causes of climate change to break this cycle of costly and continuous rebuilding. The one obvious sustainable solution is to stop and reverse increasing global temperatures.

12. To this end, the Kainaki II Declaration on Climate Change endorsed by Pacific Leaders in Tuvalu in 2019 calls for updated NDCs to keep the 1.5°C target, a global climate finance target of \$100 billion and the replenishment of the Green Climate Fund to support urgent adaptation needs and an end to inefficient and harmful fossil fuel subsidies including the phase out of coal.

Mr. President,

13. As we move closer to COP26, we make the same call on developed countries and major economies to demonstrate leadership. We need your commitment to fulfil the financial promises made in the Paris Agreement, including aligning global financial flows to be consistent with the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

14. The recent IPCC report on the Climate warns that we are inching closer to the point of no return. COP26 will be a make-or-break COP. To our developed countries, major economies, and emerging economies, we urge you to use your leadership roles to make COP26 a success. Climate change is already restricting our capacity to achieve sustainable development goals.

Mr. President,

Building Resilience with Hope

15. Our United Nations has in place systems and processes to guide our efforts to build resilience and build back better. We have the various international frameworks stemming from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Istanbul Plan of Action for LDCs, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement. It is evident that we also have the resources and the technology that we need. We must strive for strong political commitment.

16. Mr. President, I therefore urge you to work to build political commitment and development cooperation with developed countries and major economies, including emerging economies.

Mr. President,

17. Revitalizing the United Nations is critical to responding to our increasingly complicated global challenge. In terms of climate change, we applaud the appointment of the UNSG Special Adviser on Climate Change. And we look forward to the streamlining of climate change and security in the work of various UN bodies to build a UN system that is responsive to the needs of those most vulnerable to climate change.

18. Covid19 has exposed the vulnerability of our food security systems. For Tuvalu, our food security and agricultural capacity is our bloodline. It is therefore paramount to keep our oceans clean and sustainable for our people and generations to come.

19. We look forward to the implementation of the outcomes of the UN Food Systems Summit to complement and scale up our existing food security systems and programs to adapt better to climate change and support progress on the SDGs.

Mr. President,

20. I thank you for the recognition that to build resilience, we must respect the rights of people and that the UN must be revitalized to uphold the rights of all people of the world—people it was established to serve and protect.

21. On this very note, Tuvalu calls for the recognition of the rights of the people of Taiwan to the UN premises. The UN system was established to serve the public interest of all peoples. Having unhindered access to the family of nations should be a right for all, not a privilege for some.

22. It is most regrettable to see the ongoing injustice of Taiwanese people being barred from accessing UN premises for visits and meetings simply because the UN fails to recognize Republic of China (Taiwan) passports, which are, in fact accepted by almost every country in the world. Likewise, Taiwanese media outlets and journalists cannot obtain accreditation to cover UN meetings and events.

23. It is alarming that civic space in the UN and freedom of the press are being restricted. It is also unjustifiable that a person's access to UN premises now depends on nationality rather than on safety and security grounds. Granting Taiwanese passport holders' access to UN premises is an essential step for the meaningful participation of Taiwan and the Taiwanese people in the UN system.

24. It is also regrettable that the people of Cuba continue to face the economic burden of a long, unilateral economic embargo. Keeping these measures in place has robbed Cuba of the international collaboration and assistance it has required to recover from the covid19 pandemic and build back better. The embargo has ignored the principles of the Charter of the United Nations

and neglected the human rights and the spirit of cooperation espoused in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mr. President,

25. As you may realize, I have been talking mainly about climate change. This is not to diminish the importance of other global challenges which Tuvalu also continues to face. Rather, it is because for us, climate change is the single greatest threat to the lives, prosperity, and human security of our people. It is an existential threat. Tuvalu is unable to build resilience with hope, as noted in the theme of this 76th Session of the General Assembly, if climate change is allowed to continue on its current trajectory.

26. Finally, Mr. President, Tuvalu reiterates its commitment to multilateralism through unity. The Tuvalu 2021 Independence Day theme, “Unity in Word and Deed,” is a message I bring as a call to all members of the United Nations, to embrace our shared differences and unite in action to address climate change and its rampage on humankind. Working together as the global family of the United Nations, with the full respect for human rights and the needs of the planet, together we can build a sustainable future for planet Earth.

I thank you Mr. President.

Tuvalu Mo te Atua