



TUVALU

Statement

Presented by

Honorable Apisai Ielemia

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
and Labour

at

The Sixty-Fourth Session of the United Nations General Assembly
Open Debate

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Mr. President,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government
Secretary General of the United Nations
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am greatly honoured to have this opportunity to speak at this august body on behalf of the people and Government of Tuvalu who wish me first of all, to convey their warmest greetings and felicitations to the sixty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly.

At the outset, let me associate myself with previous speakers in extending our special congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly and to reassure you of our support during your presidency. I also wish to highly commend your predecessor for his exemplary leadership and dedication in the work of the General Assembly during his presidency over the past year.

Mr President,

As we enter the sixty-fourth session of the United Nations, the effects of the global financial and economic crisis loom over our heads. For a small island economy like Tuvalu which is highly reliant and dependent on the import of products from overseas, the impact of the global financial and economic crisis has been severe. The price of basic food items has risen dramatically. My people are suffering from actions, not our making. The financial and economic crisis and its impact to development and the achievement of the MDGs is a global crisis which required the cooperation of all countries. Unfortunately as always the case, it will be the poor and small countries like Tuvalu which will be facing the burden.

Mr. President,

Globalization has also left its mark in the context of swine flu fever. Tuvalu has not been immune to this pandemic. We are grateful that the World Health Organization has established a "Call to Action" to help poorer countries respond to the swine flu outbreak. Such disease outbreaks highlight the need for trade reforms with respect to access to medicines. In this context, the right to health

and access to affordable medicines should not be a right for rich nations only. Every human being has the right to a healthy life.

Mr President,

This year is a special one for the people and Government of Tuvalu, not for something that we have achieved and proud to celebrate, but strangely enough, for something that happened for the very first time in the history of my country which we strongly condemn. This is in relation to the action of pirates off the coast of Somalia. For four long months, twelve Tuvaluan seafarers were held captive aboard a German registered ship by Somali pirates. These brave Tuvaluan seamen were subject to various privations and will suffer the effects of this unlawful imprisonment for a long time.

The international shipping community cannot be held hostage to the demands of these thieves and criminals. This scourge must end. We strongly condemn this inhumane organized crime and strongly urge the United Nations and the international community to bring these pirates to justice through the application of the Principle of Universal Jurisdiction, and to take immediate action to tackle this problem head on. We further call on the United Nations to establish a special task force to address the issue of piracy.

Mr President,

The year 2009 will hopefully mark a watershed in the global fight against climate change. In a few months, we will be meeting in Copenhagen to 'seal the deal' on climate change. As the leader of one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the impacts of climate change, I hold great faith in this conference. But my faith will be diminished if key milestones are not achieved. Let me provide you a few of these milestones:

First, the international community must commit to a rapid course of action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions so that global temperatures do not increase above 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Anything higher would be disastrous for Tuvalu. Global emissions must peak by 2015 and dramatically decline thereafter.

Second, while we work to develop a new climate change agreement in Copenhagen, we must not abandon the Kyoto Protocol which is a cornerstone of action to address climate change. Let me repeat we must not abandon the Kyoto Protocol. I fear that some countries are hoping that the Kyoto Protocol will disappear so that they can take softer emission reduction commitments. I hope this will not happen as it would certainly be a significant step backwards.

Third, we need serious commitments from key greenhouse gas polluting countries. The United States must take a leadership role and drastically reduce its emissions. I make a strong appeal to President Obama to deliver a significant commitment on emissions reductions. We also call on key developing countries to dramatically reduce their emissions. Since the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was developed in 1992, the economies of a number of developing countries have risen rapidly. They must now contribute their fair share to emissions reductions.

Fourth, we need a strong commitment of finance and resources to support vulnerable countries build their resilience to the impacts of climate change. This means we need a commitment to new money. It would be foolhardy to simply reshuffle existing overseas development assistance to support actions to address climate change. This is a new threat and we must find new money to address it.

Fifth, we need to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, but in a coherent way. Carbon markets for REDD will not deliver climate change outcomes. We must develop new funds to carefully build the capacity of forested developing countries to reduce their deforestation rates. And whatever actions we take, we must ensure that the rights of Indigenous Peoples are properly protected.

Mr President,

The possible security implications of climate change to the livelihood and well being of the most vulnerable countries especially small island developing States like my own country Tuvalu cannot be ignored. Instead it should be recognised and addressed vigorously by the United Nations as part of the collective efforts by all its appropriate subsidiary bodies. Despite the concerns expressed by some

Member States on the engagement of the UN Security Council on the issue of security implications of climate change, I am pleased to note that the GA resolution on possible security implications of climate change originally initiated by the Pacific SIDS more than a year ago, was finally adopted by consensus at the GA plenary in June this year. Tuvalu looks forward to the Secretary-General's report on the possible security implications of climate change as required under this resolution.

Mr President,

Globalization has made Tuvalu a very vulnerable country. It is vulnerable to global economic shocks, highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and not the least vulnerable to disease outbreaks. However, despite the wide recognition given and reiterated with regards to our vulnerability in many different UN circles such as in Rio, Barbados and Mauritius, and Johannesburg, and in several major UN events including the MDGs Summit Declaration, the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council have not taken this seriously into consideration when addressing the question of graduation from the Least Developed Country status.

We strongly believe that Tuvalu's economic and environmental vulnerability like any other LDC and SIDS cannot be totally ignored especially in view of the impact of the current economic global crisis. Although we are pleased to welcome the latest recommendation by the United Nations Committee on Development Policy not to recommend Tuvalu for graduation out of LDC status for the next three years, we continue to appeal to this great Assembly, the ECOSOC and our development partners to carefully reconsider and review the criteria and the graduation rule for LDCs graduation. We strongly believe that no LDC that is recognised as highly vulnerable should be forced to lose its LDC status.

Mr President,

One of the priority areas that you have highlighted in your statement during the opening of the General Assembly sixty-fourth session is the United Nations reform and democratization. We cannot agree more especially to the need and importance for the General Assembly and Security Council to be revitalized and reformed respectively to enable them fulfil their roles comprehensively.

We commend the progress on the intergovernmental negotiations on the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other related matters. We fully support the need to restructure and expand the Security Council to reflect a fair and balance representation from all regions. In this context, we believe that small island developing States should be allocated a seat in the Security Council.

Mr President,

As a full Member of the United Nations, Tuvalu is proud to be part of the United Nations family with a sense of ownership through the establishment of a long overdue UN joint presence office in Tuvalu in May this year. Although we appreciate the establishment of such office, we hope that it will not create another layer of bureaucracy among the UN implementing agencies but to be more responsive to the aspirations and needs of Tuvalu in a more coherent, efficient and effective manner. More importantly, it is crucial that the office focus on the establishment of more concrete development projects on the ground for the benefits of the people of Tuvalu rather than focussing mostly on enabling activities.

Mr President,

I am compelled again to draw the attention of the UN to the plight of the people and Government of Taiwan. As a proud nation of 23 million people, Taiwan must be given the right to self determination, a principle that must uphold by the UN. Taiwan also has all the hallmarks of a nationhood, has a democratic system of government, it is certainly a responsible international player in world trade, development and diplomatic relations, and not the least has a clearly defined territory.

Although Tuvalu appreciates the long overdue courtesy finally accorded to the Government of Taiwan to participate in the General Assembly of the World Health Organisation this year as an observer, Tuvalu strongly believes that Taiwan deserves to participate more fully as a member of the WHO and other UN specialised agencies. Tuvalu therefore reiterates its strong appeal that Taiwan's aspirations and desire to participate meaningfully as a full member of specialised agencies of the UN is given proper and urgent attention it deserves.

Mr President,

In conclusion, my government acknowledges with full confidence that globalization and its impacts to every corner of the globe cannot be denied. This makes the role of the United Nations even more important. However, we need to conclude the long overdue reforms of the United Nations especially its Security Council and the General Assembly to enable the United Nations deliver its services in a more transparent, coherent, efficient and effective manner.

We must work together to rebuild the global economy, we must work together to combat climate change with special recognition given to the plight of the most vulnerable countries, especially the LDCs and SIDS, and not the least, we must work together to ensure that everyone is entitled to a healthy life. We will continue to support the United Nations and sincerely hope that the United Nations will not abandon the concerns of a small island country like Tuvalu

God Bless the United Nations. Tuvalu mo te Atua.

I thank you.