



PERMANENT MISSION  
OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

**On The Occasion of The**  
**General Debate of the General Assembly**  
**Sixty Seventh Session**  
**Statement**  
**by**  
**H.E. Lord Tu'ivakano**  
**Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade**  
**New York**  
**Friday 28 September 2012**

*Check Against Delivery*

Thank you Mr. President  
Mr. Secretary General  
Excellencies, Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Accept my sincere congratulations Mr. President upon your election to guide and oversee the important work of this session of the General Assembly.

I assure you of the support and cooperation of my delegation during your Presidency.

I must also congratulate your predecessor His Excellency Mr. Nasir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser of Qatar for his recently concluded term as the outgoing President of the Sixty Sixth Session.

During his term, he enhanced the profile and work of the General Assembly and we are pleased that your Presidency has decided to carry forward and build upon a shared theme of the settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means.

Our Organization continues to draw strength from the steady leadership of Secretary General Ban ki Moon.

Together with the Secretariat ~ they face, on a day-to-day basis, the increasingly volatile challenges and fast evolving crises around the globe with unwavering commitment and steadfast determination.

We continue to remember those of the Organization who have fallen fulfilling their duty ~ pursuing our collective aspirations reflected in the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. President

We are pleased with the convening earlier this week of the High Level Meeting on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels.

Whatever the setting or the circumstances of States like Tonga, the rule of law, is a core pillar and fundamental component of the national fabric.

Tongans take much pride in the enduring qualities of the 1875 Constitution and the early legal codes of 1839 and 1850 as instruments of visionary nation building and, with reform over time, lasting peace and stability.

It also laid the foundation for firmly setting Tonga's international relations with the global powers of the time and set us on a path that ultimately has led to membership of the global body of our time, the United Nations.

As such Tonga was pleased to join other Member States in adopting the Declaration of the High Level Meeting.

To expand and improve the role and impact of the rule of law at national, regional and international levels requires the expert and technical assistance available from the UN system, relevant intergovernmental agencies and interested development partners to be coordinated, continuous and coherent.

This week's outcome is a positive development for small jurisdictions like Tonga in strengthening its capacity to address the political, social, economic and environmental challenges of our time.

Mr. President

Building upon the Secretary General's historic attendance at last year's meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum ('PIF'), a further meeting took place this week within the margins of this year's General Debate for the first time.

An important outcome of the meeting provides a stronger and regular basis for high level interaction and an exchange of views on issues of mutual import and concern between PIF Leaders and the Secretary General.

This year's PIF meeting was hosted by the Cook Islands and our Communique gives proper focus to issues important to Tonga and the region such as sustainable development, climate change, oceans, renewable energy and gender equality.

Mr. President

Tonga, like other Small Island Developing States ('SIDS'), returned to Rio de Janeiro in June to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development to chart a new global course for sustainable development.

For many if not all SIDS, this return amounted to a re-affirmation of the special and particular vulnerabilities, recognized in 1992, which make States like Tonga unique.

With other SIDS we look to advance, during this General Assembly session, the agreement reached in Rio for a Third International Conference for the Sustainable Development of SIDS to take place in 2014.

This Third Conference should be hosted in the Pacific region.

Against the background of the recent Rio+20 and the on-going efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), such a Conference would represent an early but timely moment for SIDS to take stock of implemented outcomes.

A successful Conference can only be built upon the strong and active participation of all SIDS and a strong, responsive and cohesive UN system attuned to SIDS issues.

Building towards such a Conference will provide a boost to ongoing national initiatives such as our Tonga Strategic Development Framework and its priority objectives for 2011 to 2014.

Mr. President

Tonga joined other Member States of the Alliance of Small Island States ('AOSIS') yesterday, under the chairmanship of Nauru, in adopting a Declaration focused on the continuing serious threat of climate change to the territorial integrity, viability and survival of all Small Island States.

There is an urgent need to continue to address the security implications of climate change including the impact on territorial integrity, the frequency and severity of climate related disasters, the threat to water and food security and forced displacement of people.

Our challenge to the international community ~ in particular developed countries ~ is to 'take the bold measures necessary to reduce emissions of all greenhouse gases to levels that ensure a viable and meaningful future for SIDS like Tonga ~ for to safeguard the survival of the smallest and most vulnerable States amongst us is to safeguard a viable future for all States'.

A rising tide may lift all boats but it will drown us all.

The UNFCCC meeting in Qatar must advance efforts from Durban to bridge differences over key issues such as those related to the Kyoto Protocol's future, climate finance, closing the pre-2020 mitigation ambition gap and constructively addressing loss and damage associated with climate change impacts, bearing in mind the adaptation costs, in developing countries like Tonga.

Mr. President

This year's theme of the Pacific Islands Forum was "Large Oceans Island States – the Pacific Challenge".

It builds upon the positive outcomes of Rio+20 on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and its marine environment or what we call the 'blue economy'.

Tonga's connection with its oceanic environment, like other Pacific neighbours, is one with deep historical dimensions.

More than an ancient pathway to a maritime and seafaring past amongst disparate islands ~ the oceans and its resources ~ now potentially represent a liquid highway to a more sustainable future for Pacific peoples.

To quote an eminent Tongan scholar, the late Dr. 'Eveli Hau'ofa:

"We should not be defined by the smallness of our islands but by the greatness of our oceans. We are the sea. We are the ocean. Oceania is us."

As custodians of the ocean and its living and non-living resources, we have long appreciated that the health of the oceans is critical to maintaining a staple source of sustenance and livelihood for island communities.

We welcome the focus from Rio+20 on sustainable fisheries and developing national capacity, on the importance of access and the role of small scale and artisanal fishers and women, and on the need for concerted action to address the vulnerability of coral reefs and mangroves.

As a party to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, Tonga is actively interested to implement its obligations under the Convention including through:

- \* timely negotiation of maritime boundary delimitation agreements with neighbouring States,
- \* effective participation in the work of the International Seabed Authority and the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf,
- \* implementing related agreements such as the Fish Stocks Agreement, and
- \* considering the potential development of further legal instruments within the Convention's framework to reflect new realities.

Mr. President

During this International Year of Sustainable Energy for All, we welcome the Secretary General's High Level Event this week dedicated in part to addressing the continued development of renewable energy sources.

With like-minded AOSIS Member States, Tonga will build on the Barbados Declaration on Achieving Sustainable Energy for All in SIDS and Rio+20 to implement its voluntary commitment to reducing Tonga's greenhouse gas emissions and improving energy security through 50% renewable energy mix by 2020.

With the requisite financial resources, on-going capacity building, appropriate technology transfer and genuine partnership with dedicated development partners, such as New Zealand, Italy, Japan and the United Arab Emirates, national initiatives such as the Tonga Energy Road Map will continue to show progress and real benefit to Tongans.

We are committed to a strong advocacy role on the Council of the International Renewable Energy Agency ('IRENA') and the critical work the Agency does in pursuing a more secure and sustainable energy path.

Mr. President

Tonga joined other Member States of the Pacific Islands Forum in adopting, as an important part of the PIF Communique this year, a Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration.

It sets a valuable political platform for investing in empowering and encouraging women and young girls as a vital part of Tongan society and the region's future.

We thank Australia for her investment in 'Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development'.

Steps taken to promote and protect the interests of Tongan women and gender equality include:

- \* the extension of paid maternity leave within the Public Service from 1 to 3 months,
- \* Government approval to draft legislation on Violence Against Women and Children to be tabled during this Parliamentary session,
- \* Government approval for the conduct of nationwide consultations to reach a consensus with a view to considering the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),
- \* the launch of a National Study on Domestic Violence Against Women, and
- \* most recently the launch last week of a Social Welfare Scheme for the Elderly, for those over 75 years of age.

Without genuine improvement in gender equality, Member States will continue to struggle to achieve real progress towards meeting their MDG commitments and beyond.

Mr. President

In closing, on behalf of His Majesty King Tupou VI, Queen Nanasipau'u and the Royal Household, the Government and the People of the Kingdom of Tonga ~ I wish to convey our profound appreciation for the overwhelming messages of condolence and sympathy from Member States, the Secretary General, the UN Secretariat and the General Assembly on the untimely passing earlier this year of our much beloved King George Tupou V.

I acknowledge in particular the assistance of the People's Republic of China at that time.

Though His reign may have been short in time ~ it may yet prove timeless in enabling an environment where Tongans now exercise greater electoral democracy and enjoy a fully elected Government and a more representative Parliament.

This perhaps may His reign's most enduring legacy be.

I thank you for your attention.