

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-third Session

of the United Nations General Assembly

Wednesday, 26th September 2018

United Nations Headquarters, New York

Check Against Delivery

Madam President,

I congratulate you on the assumption of your presidency of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. I assure you that the Tonga delegation will fully support your able leadership.

I express our gratitude to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajcak, for his successful and able leadership of the Assembly at its 72nd Session, in particular making the work of the Assembly *be* people-centered, by striving for peace and a decent life for all, on a sustainable planet.

I also commend His Excellency Mr. António Guterres for the ongoing stewardship of the Secretariat. Tonga fully supports the ongoing work he is undertaking on reform, including the all-important review of the United Nations multi-country offices in the Pacific Islands region.

Madam President,

My delegation and I congratulate you also on your theme as being both timely and relevant. “Making the United Nations relevant to all people: Global leadership and shared responsibilities for peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies” aptly reflects who we are as a collective, ensuring the work of the United Nations has meaning to those that matter most – our peoples - and we welcome your theme as the guiding principle for our work this session.

Madam President,

In contributing towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its sustainable development goals (SDGs), including the internationally agreed blueprint for the sustainable development of small island developing States (SIDS), the SAMOA Pathway, Tonga has made both Agreements an integral part of its national planning processes. The government’s priority agenda from year 2018 to 2021 aligns with 13 of the 17 SDGs namely Goals, 1 to 4, 6 to 9, and 13 to 17.

Madam President,

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) remains an important means which Tonga endorses, for the follow-up, monitoring, and accountability of commitment by member states through Voluntary National Reviews which are linked to the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Tonga looks forward to presenting its first Voluntary National Report (VNR) report to the HLPF in 2019.

The HLPF will also dedicate a day at its high-level ministerial segment to the mid-term review of the SAMOA Pathway in 2019. Tonga was pleased to host the Pacific regional preparatory meeting for the mid-term review of the SAMOA Pathway in June this year of which its outcome report forms the latest iteration of the Pacific’s sustainable development aspirations. Tonga looks forward to engaging with other SIDS and partners in Samoa at the end of next month to produce the final inter-regional report for the midterm review of the SAMOA Pathway for consideration at the HLPF next year.

We recognize the important contribution of the United Nations Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing countries, and Small Island Developing States, the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations ESCAP Pacific office in this regard.

Madam President,

Tonga welcomes the convening of the 3rd High-level Meeting on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases tomorrow. Combatting the threat NCDs presents to individuals, families and communities, has been recognized as being grossly underfunded given its magnitude.

In Tonga, we are pleased to inform of commendable reductions in the prevalence of tobacco smoking and alcohol consumption. Tongan people are eating healthier food and involved more in physical activities. We are, however, not without challenges as evidenced, for example, in the rising obesity rates.

The Tongan Government is addressing the issue by making unhealthy food choices more expensive and healthier food choices cheaper for the Tongan public.

Madam President,

Climate Change continues to pose significant security threats to us as Island States. Pacific Leaders in Nauru earlier this month endorsed an expanded concept of security in their Communiqué and the *Boe Declaration* linking, *inter alia*, climate change and threats to international peace and security. In this regard, Tonga welcomes the establishment of the Group of Friends on Climate and Security to further highlight the nexus between the threats of climate change with threats to international peace and security.

We note with concern the devastating impacts of climate change on our marine environment. Baselines that determine our territorial boundaries, once established under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea, should not be affected and should remain unchanged despite the effects of sea level rise. Our Sovereignty *must not* be compromised by climate change and we welcome the work of the International Law Commission on this critically important and timely issue for consideration of the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly.

Tonga looks forward to taking our important work forward at the 24th Session of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and strongly addressing the adverse impacts of climate change, and urgent need for innovation in adaptation for SIDS under the leadership of Poland in December.

Madam President

Tonga has engaged in this year's first intergovernmental conference on the conservation and sustainable use of the biological diversity in the high seas and the seabed and we are hopeful that a gradual convergence of views will result in a zero draft of a legally binding instrument for consideration at the second and third meetings of the Inter-governmental Conference in March and August next year.

Tonga has also continued its engagement at the International Seabed Authority ensuring the appropriate management of the resources of the Area. Tonga is grateful to the members of the Authority for its re-election this year to the Council and we look forward to working together in the development of the important draft Exploitation regulations.

Tonga also looks forward to hosting the first Regional International Seabed Authority workshop in early 2019, to explore the benefits of seabed mining to the blue economy of Pacific Islands and to progressing the development of a regional treaty on deep sea mining.

We would like to acknowledge Italy's ongoing partnership with Tonga through the Joint Committee in strengthening Tonga's capacity in the field of the environment and ocean. We also acknowledge the work of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the Pew Charitable Trust on the Regional Treaty.

Madam President

Tonga commissioned its first Independent Power Producer-owned Solar Farm last year and strongly believes that it can achieve its 50% by 2020 renewable energy target through more and stronger public-private partnership arrangements.

Tonga wishes to acknowledge the partnership it has established with the Government of Austria, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, and the Pacific Community, to establish the Pacific Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency - a specialised regional entity to support private sector investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency in the Pacific Islands.

We would also like to recognize and acknowledge the announcement made by the Government of Norway of its commitment to provide US Dollar 2 million in support of the important work of the Centre.

Madam President,

Finally, sustainable development, whether it be, inter alia, through good health and well-being, climate action, life below water, or affordable and clean energy, *can only be realized through international peace and security*. We continue to look to the Security Council to protect the innocent from threats to international peace and security in whatever form, be they traditional threats such as armed conflict, or newer threats like climate change, to ensure no one is left behind.

May Almighty God guide and bless you, and all the member states of the United Nations, their respective Governments, and our peoples.

Thank you