



**TUVALU**

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**Statement  
Presented by the  
PRIME MINISTER OF TUVALU  
Honourable Enele Sosene Sopoaga**

**at**

**The 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

**General Debate**

**September 21, 2017**

**New York**

**President of the General Assembly  
Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

1. Next week on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, Tuvalu will mark its 39<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence. It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the Government and people of Tuvalu, to thank the United Nations and all its Membership for granting Tuvalu the recognition of full sovereignty in October 1978.

2. Twenty-nine years after on the eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, September 2000, Tuvalu was admitted as the 169<sup>th</sup> Member of the UN, with the rights of full participation as a Member of the UN Family. Our joining the UN is a journey of hope. Hope in the noble values of this great body, the UN, and trust in its ability to assure humanity, including small and vulnerable countries like mine, peace and security, and prosperity for our survival.

3. I record Tuvalu's sincere gratitude to the UN and its specialized agencies, development partners especially our traditional partners in the Pacific, regional bodies of the Pacific, friends in Asia, India, South Korea, Japan, in the Republic of China/Taiwan, in the EU and others for all your support to my island nation of Tuvalu. We welcome the friendship and partnership of UN members and other entities as we advance forward.

4. Mr President, we applaud the theme of the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Debate, "Focusing on people: striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet." It captures the undeniable linkage between peace, security and sustainable development. It underscores that, without peace and security, our 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will not deliver a fair globalization for all. In short, without sustainable development, there will be no peace and security.

5. Accordingly, I congratulate you, Mr President, on your appointment to the Presidency and for your vision on the 72<sup>nd</sup> Session. And I also congratulate the outgoing President of the General Assembly Mr. Peter Thomson of Fiji for his efforts and outstanding leadership – sa vinaka vakalevu.

6. Mr President, as a small and vulnerable island nation, I want to express Tuvalu's deepest sympathy to the people in the USA and in the Caribbean islands who are being affected by the destruction of the recent hurricanes and tropical cyclones. These unfortunate events clearly show the magnitude and urgency of global work still required of the UN to better prepare, protect and save peoples and humanity from these calamities.

7. We also share the devastating grief of the people of Mexico including young school children following the earthquake this week, and other peoples suffered by disasters, and violence around the world. Our prayers that Almighty God gives comfort to the affected people and their loved ones, for speedy recovery.

8. Mr President, horrific acts of violence and terrorism continue to plague our world. Countless innocent lives are destroyed and lost. Violence in any form is a direct threat to peace and security, and seriously undermines our efforts to achieve sustainable development. We therefore condemn violence and terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

9. We are particularly concerned with the threat to global peace and security posed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We acknowledge the persistent efforts of the Security Council to de-escalate tensions. A renewed engagement with inclusive diplomatic dialogue is, in our view, the only option to solve the crisis on the Korean Peninsula. We believe that a military response will lead to unimaginable destruction and loss of lives. History has taught us the mistakes of the past that we must not repeat.

10. In this vein, Tuvalu maintains its commitments in support of all international legal instruments against violence and terrorism. It is critical that we support international law for the protection and promotion of human rights. We commend the establishment of the Office of Counter Terrorism to ensure the effective and balanced implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

11. Just yesterday, with pride on behalf of Tuvalu, I signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as a further commitment to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, which was negotiated and drafted in the 1984 Pacific Island Leaders Forum held in Tuvalu. It is our fervent hope that nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, including the trade of materials and development of technologies to produce such weapons, are totally banned and prohibited worldwide by the UN. Humanity must be advanced not on the principles of fear and deterrence, not on the adage of might is right, rather on moral justice for human equity, trust, respect, and the true enjoyment of basic human rights.

12. Mr President, the entry into force of the Paris Agreement last year raised our hopes that, recognizing the existential threat to us all, Member States would commit to the common cause of fighting climate change, adapting to its impacts, and strengthening the ability of developing States, especially the most vulnerable, to deal with those impacts. The Paris Agreement is our common hope of a decent life on a sustainable planet. For Tuvalu, it is our hope of security and survival.

13. That hope, however, dimmed with the announcement by the United States that it will abandon the Paris Agreement. That decision risks undermining our global efforts to save and protect the livelihoods of the people that are at risk from the impacts of climate change. These are the marginalized, the vulnerable, the poor, the women and children who suffer the most from climate change, and especially the people living on low-lying islands and coastal areas. These people count in the tens of millions and the number is increasing at an alarming rate.

14. Domestic economic and political interests, are often short term and benefitting only a few, should not be pursued at the expense of a decent life for us all, current and future

generations, on a sustainable planet. This is the spirit that underpins our 21<sup>st</sup> century development system. We therefore urge the United States to re-unite with us and to allow all of us, in particular the most vulnerable, the best possible chance to save ourselves, and the sustainable future of humanity. We are nevertheless encouraged by the strong leadership of the Canadian Prime Minister and French President on climate change.

15. We welcome the Secretary General's intention to convene a dedicated climate summit in 2019 to mobilise political support. It will be an important opportunity to review our progress and momentum, and most importantly, to enhance our commitments to take urgent and credible actions to reverse global warming.

16. We are also encouraged by the Secretary General's commitment to intensify high-level political engagement to limit temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and in fact aiming at limiting the increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius. We are likewise heartened by his dedication to rallying the UN systems to better support Member States by mobilizing resources and strengthening partnerships in their pursuance of climate actions.

17. Indeed, without enhanced commitment and genuine partnerships, the Paris Agreement will not save us - the most vulnerable. Climate change is a risk multiplier on all factors of development. Its challenges are complex and changing. It is for this reason that we reiterate our call for the appointment of a Special Representative on Climate Change and Security for enhanced international focus, coordination and commitment.

18. In the same vein, we call for climate change and security to be a permanent item in the agenda of the Security Council, given its direct threat to global peace and security.

19. For Tuvalu and many of the low-lying islands, our peace and security is not imperiled by traditional threats of conflicts, violence, drugs, weapons, famine, or diseases. Instead, as the Male' Declaration on the Human Dimension of Climate Change recognized in 2007, "the impacts of climate change pose the most immediate, fundamental and far-reaching threat" to individuals and communities in these most vulnerable States, and threaten a wide range of human rights, including "the right to life, the right to take part in cultural life, the right to use and enjoy property, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to food, and the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."

20. Ten years ago, Mr President, we recognized that climate change was the single major threat to our peace, security, and ultimately our survival. It remains so today, and the situation grows more urgent every day. Under current warming trends, our islands may be submerged into the sea within the next 50 years. If and when this happens, we will be forced to abandon our islands, even though we are the least contributors to global warming and sea level rise. That forced relocation or displacement of our people is an injustice and an infringement on our fundamental and basic human rights.

21. It is for this very reason that we continue to call for enhanced global commitment and partnerships in the implementation of the Paris Agreement. We cannot give up on this campaign, for two very simple reasons. First, relocation and statelessness are unacceptable, as any of us here would agree. Second, we know as you do, that the membership of our global family of the United Nations has the tools and the resources to save Tuvalu and low-lying states from the impacts of climate change. It is only a question of whether we have the will and courage to help.

22. Mr President, we have come together to face grave risks before. Over the years, the international community, guided by the Charter of the United Nations, cooperated on many fronts to deal with threats such as ebola and cholera, violence, natural disasters, and subsequently, the lives and rights of people displaced by such threats.

23. During those circumstances, the international response was immediate because human lives and human rights were at risk and needed protection. The response was also immediate because the threats were potential global threats to humanity. For others, however, their response was driven by political and economic interests. But most importantly, the threats were controlled and human lives and human rights were saved and protected.

24. Sadly however, displacement by impacts of climate change have not yet drawn the same international concern and response, despite the fact that it has the very real potential to become a serious threat to global peace, security and human rights.

25. Uncontrolled mass migration into Europe as a result of conflicts and natural disasters taught us a very important lesson - that we should have had in place effective international institutions and systems to control, manage and protect the rights of migrants. In exactly the same manner, we must now be formulating effective international systems to protect the human rights of people displaced by the impacts of climate change, and avoid further uncontrolled mass migration and mass violation of human rights.

26. That preparation must include developing the appropriate international legal tools to cope with the complex and multifaceted challenges posed by climate change, which cut across a number of different areas of international law. In particular, the current refugee regimes, which were developed to cope with the traditional threats, do not adequately protect people forced to leave their homes by the impacts of climate change. We therefore reiterate our proposal for a UN Resolution on the establishment of a legal process to protect the human rights and ultimately save the lives of people displaced by the impacts of climate change.

27. Mr President, as a least developed country and a SIDS, we need enhanced global support to overcome the structural challenges we face in implementing the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. On our own part, Tuvalu has developed its national strategy for sustainable development, Te Kakeega III, premised on building resilience through good

governance, inclusive participation, and capacity measures of mitigation of NDCs with targets of 100% renewable energy by 2020, and coastal protection adaptation on all islands to protect and save Tuvalu.

28. We are grateful to the international community through the GCF, the GEF, and the UNDP as well as through bilateral sources for their generous support. While grateful for the goodwill, we have established the Tuvalu Climate Change and Disaster Survival Fund as a facility to help people respond quickly to impacts of tropical cyclones, hurricanes and wave surges.

29. To enhance further adaptation work, access to appropriate infrastructures, maritime ports, airports, technology connectivity, health, quality education, and renewable energy are critical areas of particular priority. Tuvalu will welcome the development of genuine and durable partnerships as are aspired under the SAMOA Pathway.

30. In regards to the issue of LDC graduation, it is our view that a country must only graduate when it can achieve sustainable development, not merely when it should be able to achieve sustainable development. Misguided graduation will only impose further constraints to our efforts to achieve sustainable development. Unique vulnerability of SIDS/LDCs like Tuvalu must be the central criteria of consideration for LDC graduation.

31. As small islands surrounded by vast oceans, we interact with the ocean every day of our lives. We are heavily dependent on the ocean as a source of food and for many of us, the ocean is central to our achievement of sustainable development. We firmly believe that once we have established our baselines under the UN Convention on the Law of the sea, these baselines as well as the maritime zones shall be remained forever. This is irrespective of sea level rise.

32. The ongoing discussions on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction (“BBNJ”) must ensure that small island developing states, with our particular vulnerabilities, are provided the necessary financial and technical support to guarantee our equal and fair participation in the management of BBNJ and the sharing of benefits from the BBNJ Instrument. We must agree at this Assembly to commence work on developing a legal binding agreement to give protection to biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.

33. Our 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is universal and holistic in that it applies to all countries and actors, and covers all aspects of sustainable development. Critical to its success, the agenda is rooted in human rights and genuine partnerships.

34. But Mr President, the vibrant democracy of Taiwan who has long been an active and responsible development partner to many countries including Tuvalu, is being denied participation in the UN systems. It cannot be right, that the 22<sup>nd</sup> largest global economy with a notable capacity to contribute, could not effectively participate in our 2030 Agenda.

This is unfortunate when our 2030 Agenda needs genuine global partnerships to mobilise all available resources to be successful.

35. Under its principle of universality, the UN should allow the 23 million people of Taiwan their fundamental right to participate fully in the UN systems, and to benefit and contribute effectively to its programs.

36. In the same vein, the people of Cuba must be allowed to freely exercise their rights to determine their own political, economic and social systems. With their rights and trade restricted by the unilateral blockade by the US, the people of Cuba are denied effective participation in our UN SDGs programme.

37. Of similar concerns, the people of West Papua should be enabled to exercise their fundamental right, with the intervention of this responsible body, to allow them to determine their own development aspirations and future. The West Papuans are a distinct people with Pacific roots, with their own land, history and identity. The violation of human rights in West Papua is a constant matter of great concern to us. Tuvalu strongly believes the UN must engage in setting a clear pathway to addressing these issues and the issue of self-determination of the people.

38. We must embrace the genuine partnership of those who can contribute to the realization of a decent life in our marginalized communities. We cannot ignore and risk leaving behind those whose hope for a decent life, but are being constrained by violence, natural disasters, violation of human rights, atrocities, and impacts of climate change. We cannot leave anyone behind.

39. Finally Mr President, I want to lend Tuvalu's strong support for a Global Pact on the Environment. We need an internationally legally binding agreement that protects our rights to a safe and clean environment.

40. We are but on one canoe for humanity, no one country must jump ship! We either must paddle together to keep us afloat and safe. Or allow the canoe to sink, and we all drown. It is our hope, that with this Global Pact and the Paris Agreement, the canoe, we can save Tuvalu, and if we can save Tuvalu we can save the world.

41. God Bless the Family of the United Nations.

**TUVALU MO TE ATUA**