



**Statement**  
**by**  
**Honourable Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi,**  
**Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa**  
**at the**  
**General Debate,**  
**United Nations General Assembly**  
**Seventy third session,**  
**New York, 28 September 2018**

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Madam President,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have had the privilege to address the General Assembly in the last 21 years as Samoa's Prime Minister and my message has remained consistent throughout the passing years.

Put simply, **"climate change poses the single greatest threat especially to Small Island developing states like Samoa, not through our doing or choice, and that the need to take effective action to mitigate against climate change impacts is urgent and real"**.

**Climate change as well encompasses the breadth of security issues facing our Blue Pacific region including human security,**

**environmental and resource security, transnational crime and cyber security.**

As we have explained to the United Nations, climate change is one of the most pressing security challenges for island countries – affecting food security, access to safe water, fundamentally affecting our ability to draw sustenance from the pristine ocean and seas that surround us. Climate change is the highest priority challenge facing countries of the world and does not discriminate between rich and poor.

And the logic of our perspective is simple.

Climate change embodies the fullness of Samoa's realities and aspirations. It impacts our society, our economy, our culture, our faith and our way of life and will continue to be our overriding priority policy concern and major pre-occupation including of our Pacific region, today and well into the future.

It is a societal problem requiring a decisive response from the world community. Its global reach and impact should unite and strengthen our resolve, not weaken and divide us. As a united community, there is a great deal that we could achieve to arrest and even reverse the threat of climate change. Its impacts are worsening by the day. No one country, or single group of nations, and no single organization can solely win the war against climate change. The divergent, yet inextricably linked interests of member states demands that we work together.

Our Paris Agreement on Climate Change was a beacon of hope especially for the vulnerable island states. It is based on shared responsibilities, trust, collaboration and principled action. It demonstrates a new brand of cooperation and broad outlook, where the narrow pursuits of self-interests, the use of economic and political expediencies were to be set aside. It was meant to be a timely reminder that no action is too small or insignificant. All contributions matter and every action counts irrespective of who provides it. Importantly, it places the responsibility of addressing climate change squarely on every leader and on every individual country in terms of the implementation of their Nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement.

It is indeed worrisome and alarming that the level of commitments to the Paris Agreement by member states will not keep global warming anywhere below 1.5 degrees Celsius which is the ideal and moral goal to save Planet Earth. Without that, the continuing existence of some low-lying islands in our Pacific region and elsewhere will be in grave doubt.

We must work together with a sense of urgency and commitment to address climate change, today, and now. It should not just be the science that recommends what we should do, but also our conscience and the political will to follow through.

Clearly, we want leaders who view the world as a single constituency where all must work together within the limits of their capacity and capability to be part of the total solution. Samoa wants to be part of the solution because it is in our interest to do so.

As for those suggesting they are implementing bold actions for the sake of our vulnerable islands, they need to be quietly reminded that in the final analysis, implementation initiatives, will ultimately benefit their economies, people and survival of their countries.

For vulnerable countries, the issue is not about setting new targets, commissioning more studies and reports or even more polite talk shops and structured dialogue sessions, it is about adaptation now and long-term survival.

The United Nations remains our last best hope to provide the political will and the necessary commitment to turn the tide against climate change.

Samoa appeals to member states of our organization in positions of world leadership, to lead the charge in finding and implementing solutions to the causes of climate change. As custodians of our world's environment, we owe it to our future generations to do what needs to be done quickly, and decisively.

In the same way that nations in leadership roles are called to account in doing the right thing for our world, so must all the member states of the UN uphold their part of the bargain in the work that needs to be done. Without this cooperation from all member states, reaching the objectives we all know should be achieved, would continue to elude us.

The Pacific region is already facing the destructive impacts of climate change and disasters. Cyclones, floods, droughts, Sea level rise and ocean acidification are taking their toll on the health and well being of our peoples, environment and economies. Disaster related economic losses in

Pacific island countries as a percentage of GDP are higher than almost anywhere else in the world.

Our people are waiting, the world is watching. It is incumbent on each individual leader and country to raise the level of ambition not just as an inspirational goal, but as deliverables of the Paris Agreement. For the Pacific peoples and our Blue Pacific region, urgent ambitious action on climate change is the only option. We welcome the determination resonated in the UN Secretary General's remarks to the General Assembly earlier this month to 'sound the alarm' on the need for bolder action on climate change.

These are big asks to deliver on. It will be naïve to think otherwise.

But when the future existence of sovereign island nations, populations and cultures are at stake, then there is a moral imperative for the world to act decisively and collectively.

Madam President

The Pacific leaders are increasingly conscious of and concerned about the security of our region. And we look at security not just from the orthodox perspective of state security, but what security means for us Pacific communities. The *Framework for Pacific Regionalism* identifies security as one of the four objectives of regionalism – "Security that ensures stable and safe human, environmental and political conditions for all".

Forum Leaders have renewed commitment to work together as one Blue Pacific continent particularly in view of the renewed geopolitical interests in the Pacific region. Suddenly the Pacific is swimming in a rising tide of so-called 'fit for purpose' strategies stretched from the tip of Africa, encompassing the Indian Ocean and morphing into the vast Blue PacificOcean continent – that is our home and place. The big powers are doggedly pursuing strategies to widen and extend their reach and inculcating a far-reaching sense of insecurity.

The renewed vigour with which a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy' is being advocated and pursued leaves us with much uncertainty. For the Pacific there is a real risk of privileging Indo over the 'Pacific'

While the Pacific region currently enjoys a period of relative stability, drivers of instability exist in the region and beyond. The *2017 State of Pacific Regionalism Report* indicated that shifting global and regional geopolitics is creating an increasingly complex and crowded region that places the Pacific at the centre of contemporary global geopolitics. This trend, coupled with broader challenges such as climate change, rising inequality, resource depletion, maritime boundary disputes and advances in technology, will continue to shape the Pacific regional security environment.

While the world be-labours the issues of security around military might and the wonders of technological advancement in reaching such ends, our priority in the pacific is to maintain stability of our governments

and countries. We can do this through a review of our governance pathways and ensure that our elected leaders respond to people's needs.

Pacific Island Forum Members have a proud history of working collectively in response to events and issues that have challenged regional security, peace and stability, from the 1985 *Rarotonga Treaty* that created a nuclear free zone in the South Pacific, to a collective approach to addressing the existential threat of climate change.

The Pacific region's current geopolitical and geostrategic context underlines the need for an integrated and comprehensive security architecture, incorporating an expanded concept of security. A stable and resilient security environment provides the platform for achieving the region's sustainable development aspirations.

In recognition of this, in 2017, Forum Leaders "agreed to build on the Biketawa Declaration and other Forum **security** related declarations as a foundation for strategic future regional responses, recognizing the importance of an expanded concept of security and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change.<sup>1</sup>" Leaders have also prioritized action on climate change and disaster risk management, fisheries, and oceans management and conservation – all of which have significant security elements.

As if being vulnerable to climate change is not a lifelong challenge, the label of "Pacific Small island developing state" can also have its

unintended trials and tribulations. For far too long we have been given to believe "they are little and classified 'have nots'. We are susceptible to being characterized as countries that have little, and that we should be grateful for whatever is offered to us. We are highly protective of our means of livelihoods and have embraced regional action to ensure the sustainability of our fisheries resources. And we are actively asserting our ambitions to ensure that there is inheritance for the generations to come.

Any such approach for engagement with partners must be genuine and durable and premised on understanding, friendship, mutual benefit and a collective ambition to achieve sustainable results. They must also be nonpartisan and non-interventionist.

And in the process, our partners have fallen short of acknowledging the integrity of Pacific leadership and the responsibility they carry for every decision made, in order to garner support for the sustainable development of their nations. Some might say that there is a 'patronizing' nuance in believing that Pacific nations do not know what they were doing or were incapable of reaping the benefits of close relations with countries that are and will be in the region for some time to come. In cases where emerging partners have engaged with Pacific countries without conditionality, the relationships are perceived to be associated with corruption or unprecedented environmental degradation. One has the tendency to be bemused by the fact that the reaction is an attempt to hide what we see as strategic neglect.

Where we are now would not have been possible without the valuable support of our circle of partners, and the value of the partnerships we had nurtured and cultivated over the years to respond to the multitude of needs of our people.

The friendly relations we have with some partners are construed by others as compromising and obtrusive, prompting some to speak up for us to ward off the influences we are supposedly too naïve to recognize. By the same token we are given alternatives that reflect interests beyond altruism and conversion of the poor. As Pacific leaders we need to ask ourselves what we ought to do in order to make a difference for us and for the world – and to promote our values premised on peace stability and security.

Our geographical isolation and insularity no longer shields or protects us from the increasingly complex and dynamic security challenges – transnational crime, nuclear proliferation, challenges to sovereignty, and humanitarian crises. The rules based international system is being bent out of shape. Gone were the days when we took only what we needed from our environment; when we were a lot more conscious of the importance of the continuity of our cultures and values, unadulterated by the infringing, impinging world around us. Then, we did not worry much about borders because the original migrations of our peoples defined for us our ocean space and place. Poverty was not a part of our consciousness because we cared for each other and the oceans provided their bounty.

We should not be influenced by economic dependence as that is a compromise in itself. We should seek to strengthen domestic cohesion, develop resilience and rethink our governance pathways.

The Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum are committed to a vision for the Pacific – that it be a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy, and productive lives now and into the future. And moreover, we have committed to working together to achieve this vision.

The Blue Pacific platform offers all Pacific countries the adaptive capabilities to address a changing geostrategic landscape. The opportunity to realize the full benefits of the Blue Pacific rests in our ability to work and stand together as a political bloc. And the challenge for us is maintaining solidarity in the face of intense engagement of an ever growing number of partners in our region. **We should not let that divide us!**

Madam President

In 4 weeks time, Samoa will be hosting the Interregional meeting of Small Island developing states and their development partners in preparation for the five-year review of the SAMOA Pathway during the High-level week next year in September. My Government looks forward to welcoming our guests and we thank the United Nations member states and the Small Island Developing States in particular for agreeing to allow the SAMOA Pathway to make a brief return to its namesake and birthplace.

Let me conclude by acknowledging the support of all those member states of the United Nations, Samoa's circle of friends, who supported our candidate's re-election to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Thank you