



**HON. HU'AKAVAMEILIKU  
PRIME MINISTER OF TONGA**

**Statement on the occasion of the  
General Debate**

**at the Seventy-eighth Session  
of the United Nations General Assembly**

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**Mr. President,**

I bring warm greetings from the Kingdom of Tonga and congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the 78<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I thank your predecessor, His Excellency Csaba Kőrösi, for his able stewardship in driving solutions built on solidarity, science and seeking sustainability.

Our delegation fully supports your vision for this 78th session – “Peace, Prosperity, Progress and Sustainability.”

The General Assembly's essential work is in expert hands with your leadership, and we hope it will continue and improve.

The theme for this session of “*Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity: accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals towards peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability for all*” is more urgent than ever.

I thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, for his stewardship of the UN during these most challenging times.

I offer my heartfelt condolences to the governments and peoples of Morocco and Libya. The people of my country feel for the families of the victims, for the tragic loss of lives in the recent natural disasters that occurred in their countries.

**Mr. President,**

We convene at a time where people, countries, regions, our world confront a quick succession of multiple challenges.

Climate change threats have reached an existential level. The heightened frequency and severity of cyclones, rising sea levels caused by melting polar ice, plastic and pollution in our oceans, as well as heatwaves and fires, are causing suffering in my country, our people, and our Pacific region.

There are many related consequences.

We are confronted with ever-increasing rates of non-communicable diseases, persistent inequalities, declining basic living conditions, and mounting violence against women and girls.

Furthermore, there has been a substantial surge in the trafficking and utilization of unlawful narcotics and cross-border criminal activities.

Many of these are borderless challenges concerning us all and calling for collaboration.

The increasing geopolitical mistrust and conflicts are worrisome, particularly given the pressing need for multi-lateral action.

This disruption affects the lives of millions, provokes excessive inflation, hikes fuel prices, and raises food costs. A sense of uncertainty arises among individuals worldwide on how to fulfill their fundamental requirements.

Our window to discuss past talks is closing rapidly.

Our responsibility is to act. The means of retaining people's trust and inspiring hope is through taking action and achieving results.

**Mr. President,**

This session demands our collective and pressing action.

However, this can only be achieved in the presence of trust and enduring peace.

Trust is the foundation for any productive and sustainable human interaction, including international cooperation. Trust and respect are the drivers for thriving and sustainable change. Without trust, or worse, its erosion, our joint endeavor to foster peace, security, and sustainable development is rendered futile. It becomes unattainable.

It is therefore our duty to rebuild that trust upon which the United Nations was founded. It will take more than **DIALOGUE**. It calls for concrete actions that demonstrate our commitment to shared values.

**Mr. President,**

Multilateralism has proven to be and must continue to be our most effective instrument for fostering global solidarity and tackling global challenges.

**Mr. President,**

We must reflect on whether we are truly serving the intended goals of the Charter. Why have we fallen so far behind? What have we not done right?

My forthcoming remarks will delve into the Sustainable Development Goals.

The challenge at hand is to prevent the SDGs from being relegated to another unattainable goal.

Despite the difficulty, it is imperative that we investigate the root causes of our significant lag in attaining our development targets.

The SDG Progress Report tells us that more than half of the world is left behind. We deny people; we deny kids; we deny hope.

Over 50% of the SDG targets are considered “weak and insufficient”.

Gender, poverty, hunger, and climate targets make up a portion of the 30% that have either stalled or reversed.

This is not acceptable.

One key aspect of course relates to Financing for Development. Tonga supports the Review of the International Financial architecture to ensure it is fit for purpose.

It is imperative that we promptly provide predictable, stable, and substantial support for nations struggling with financial difficulties.

Tonga and other small island developing states require greater access to concessional finance to support our development endeavours and strengthen our resilience against external shocks.

Tonga fully supports the call for debt relief for countries that find themselves in dire circumstances, particularly those that have been severely affected by natural disasters or other external shocks.

We are firmly convinced that addressing the underlying reasons for debt vulnerability in small island developing states is critically important.

This is particularly relevant because SIDS are acutely vulnerable to the multifaceted and urgent challenges posed by climate change.

We have raised this issue over decades. The dangers are more pressing than ever, putting at risk not only lives and livelihoods, but also our economies and our fundamental identity. We are running out of time. We call upon the international community, comprising both public and private sectors, to collaborate with us in identifying sustainable solutions to these problems. Our collaboration is crucial, as it is only through it we can achieve the commitment of a more sustainable and robust future for all.

Day by day, climate change becomes more of an existential menace to Tonga and the Pacific.

Tonga has been making genuine efforts to combat the effects of Climate Change on our means of subsistence for a long time.

Our goal is to decrease reliance on fossil fuel by 70% before the year 2025. As early as 2010, Tonga pioneered a global breakthrough by creating, validating, and executing the first-ever joint national action plan on climate change adaptation and disaster risk management.

It can be done. The IPCC 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Report underscores that the 1.5-degree goal is achievable if emissions peak by 2025 and are halved by 2030.

Do we have the will?

We urge all of you to do your utmost to keep emissions below 1.5 degrees and we strongly encourage the completion of the first Global Stock-take.

Here and there we get glimpses of hope. The decision on the Loss and Damage Fund, announced at COP 27, was historical. Yet, it is now and with a sense of urgency that we must operationalize the Loss and Damage Fund. We urge that the vulnerable SIDS countries must be provided with increased and streamlined admission to the Loss and Damage mechanism. While upholding complete accountability, we must establish more efficient and swift means of accessing standard operating procedures.

Due to the magnitude and urgency of the matter in our region, we wholeheartedly back the formation of a Pacific Fund to offer direct assistance to Pacific SIDS in their endeavors to tackle climate change impacts.

Indeed, my country is determined to take a lead on the issue, having being appointed the champion on climate financing for the Pacific.

I can only say it again. The Pacific leaders, have, for decades now, called upon the international community for urgent climate action.

Have our voices been acknowledged and our pleas earnestly addressed?

The climate finance commitments made by developed countries fall significantly short of the promised \$100 billion per year starting in 2020.

This brings me to Climate Justice.

Tonga felt encouraged by the historic adoption by consensus of the General Assembly resolution, led by Vanuatu and a core group of countries, to call on the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion on the obligations of States regarding climate change. This marks an important milestone in our decades-long struggle for climate justice.

Earlier this year, I attended the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework. Again, and as has already been reiterated by colleagues from the Pacific, our countries need more progress and remain at the forefront of battling climate-related hazards.

Again, timely access to finance prevents SIDS from making the progress we hope for and must have. So today, and as we have done frequently, I call for action to review the largely uncoordinated funding mechanisms, to prioritize short-term post-disaster financing needs and to address long-term risk reduction. I also call for investing much more into increasing resilience, especially resilience education. Possessing the tools to demonstrate resilience is a significant part of the preparation.

Long-term risk mitigation and reduction are also intrinsically linked to Early Warning Systems.

We acknowledge the United Nations Secretary General's Early Warning For All initiative announced at COP27 last year. We affirm Tonga's commitment to its implementation. We reaffirm the resolution that Strengthening Multi-hazard Early

Warning Systems is most relevant for implementing the Sendai Framework 2015-2030.

Tonga has taken on a lead in this area for our region by implementing a Nationwide Early Warning System throughout Tonga with communications and siren systems.

**Mr. President,**

As has been said often, we are small land states and vast ocean nations. In fact, our very being, our identity, can not be separated from our precious ocean.

The Secretary-General's report reiterates that the "*ocean remains under significant threat from human activities*". Marine biodiversity is disturbed due to over-exploitation and ocean acidification. "*Over one-third of fish stocks are being harvested at unsustainable levels and coastal waters are polluted with chemicals, plastics and human waste*".

Urgent remedial actions are imperative to minimize the imminent threat and mitigate the damage we are currently facing.

We are encouraged by the adoption of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement).

We congratulate Ambassador Rena Lee for the successful conclusion of the vital BBNJ Agreement. We now have a foundation to ensure that our work on the conservation and protection of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction continues into the future. Tonga looks forward to joining State Parties in its implementation.

We are pleased that the new Agreement recognizes the Special Circumstances of SIDS like those in the Pacific.

It is now imperative that this recognition is translated into tangible capacity building, transfer of marine technology, and sufficient support, to enable the Pacific to emerge as an even more proactive leader for initiatives that safeguard, preserve, and sustainably utilize the Ocean and its resources.

**Mr. President,**

Tonga, in support of the Pacific Islands Forum Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise, commits to securing the limits of the Blue Pacific Continent. We do so to promote the stability, security, certainty, and predictability of maritime entitlements irrespective of the impacts of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise.

**Mr. President,**

Tonga had the honor of co-chairing, along with Finland, the twenty-third meeting of the Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea. Its theme of new maritime technologies: challenges and opportunities, highlighted the potential benefits of new maritime technologies. New technologies ought to help address threats facing the ocean, building resilient oceans and coastal communities, mitigating the impacts of climate change. This is a condition to achieve the goals of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. It is essential for accomplishing the aims set forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, notably Sustainable Development Goal 14.

**Mr. President,**

Tonga continues to be fully committed to the effective implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the 1994 Agreement on implementing Part XI of the Convention (1994 Agreement).

Tonga reaffirms the sovereign rights of States recognized and enshrined within UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement.

Tonga attaches the greatest importance to the sustainable use of ocean resources, be they living and non-living. Tonga recognizes the important role played by the International Seabed Authority in administering and managing the Area in line with its legal mandate under Part XI of UNCLOS. As one of the evolving Organs of UNCLOS, it is vital that States Parties avoid instances of arbitrary interpretation of the Convention.

Tonga is committed to engaging in good faith in the negotiations of the exploitation regulations to ensure its embodiment of good industry practices and best environmental management practices

We acknowledge the contribution of the International Seabed Authority towards the advancement of the 2030 Agenda, contributing to 12 of the 17 SDGs directly. We commend its efforts to boost the capacity of developing States, including Pacific



Small Island Developing States, through better access to critical data and support in consolidating national frameworks and regulations relating to activities in the Area.

**Mr. President,**

Tonga was honored to host the Small Island Developing States of the Pacific Region in Nuku‘alofa to prepare for the Fourth International Conference on SIDS to be held in Antigua and Barbuda in 2024.

**Mr. President,**

We live in times of profound paradigm shifts. Uncertainty characterizes the global political, financial and economic situation. The last few years have brought about multiple crises having a disproportionate impact on the scope for sustainable development in SIDS over the next decade.

We, as a region and as a country, are united and determined in our pursuit of inclusive sustainable development for our citizens.

It is a course we seek to pursue together with you, and we invite your partnership. We are grateful for this Assembly’s resolution to develop an index capable of capturing our special circumstances and vulnerabilities on our road to resilient and sustainable development.

We must ensure that the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) is not another academic exercise.

Foremost, the MVI tool must be regarded as an action tool, focusing primarily on ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of vulnerability.

We need a tool that can provide meaningful and effective assistance, where, and when needed.

We therefore call on the adoption of the MVI by this assembly, and its operationalization incorporating a criterion for access by Pacific SIDS to low-cost and long-term financing.

**Mr President**

At a high-level event this week on Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity, co-chaired by the Leaders of Palau, Tonga and Bezos Earth Fund, the conference called for development partners and stakeholders to transform the Pacific region with three key goals: i) Effective ocean management; ii) Healthy, happy communities, and, iii) fit-for-purpose sustainable financing.

I stress the vital role of political champions and support in this journey for securing the Blue Pacific Continent's contribution to global stability, biodiversity restoration, promoting healthy food systems and improving people's well-being.

**Mr. President,**

My term as President of the sixth session of the SIDS DOCK Assembly ends in December 2023. I express my profound gratitude to our members for the confidence placed in me and for the support provided during my tenure.

**Mr. President,**

The essence of life, existence, and advancement lies in hope. Our young generations must be given more than the bleak outlook of over 50% of SDG targets being weak and insufficient. Today's young people are the future custodians of the planet. We must actively promote and engage youth in a substantial manner to propel the attainment of sustainable development goals.

Children and youth under 30 years of age represent about 40% of the world's population. Their voices must be heard in decision-making bodies. Their voices must be empowered by giving them the opportunity to be involved in decision-making and policymaking processes.

**Mr. President,**

In commemoration of "United Nations Day " on October 24th, the Kingdom of Tonga and the Family Offices for Sustainable Development (FOSD) will host the *Environmental Symphony* here in the General Assembly Hall.

The purpose of this event goes beyond celebrating and reaffirming the principles of the UN Charter, which have guided humanity for the past 78 years.

We wish to mobilize "Partners for the Goals" in the lead up to the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai and may I add, we hope to welcome you to our region for a COP 31 where we fully support Australia's bid for a 2026 Pacific COP.

**Mr. President,**

This century is still young, but never has it been more urgent in this century to rekindle our commitment to the values and principles upon which the UN was founded.

We must live up to our pledge to uphold the United Nations Charter and demonstrate through action the timeless relevance of its purposes and principles.

This is what I call living by example global solidarity.

Unless we breathe life and vigor into the Charter, we are helpless and condemned to reenact the mistakes and horrors of the past.

Let us draw inspiration and fortitude from the courageous actions of the founding members who established this esteemed institution that we are now entrusted with for posterity.

**Mr. President,**

The theme peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability for all is our roadmap for what we must deliver.

This is about a world where every person can live with dignity, free from fear and discrimination. This requires courage, commitment, cooperation and recognizing with humility our shared humanity.

Allow me to conclude by reminding this august assembly of how it was founded.

The heart of the United Nations Charter rests in the determination to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”.

We therefore ought to do our utmost to rebuild trust in multilateralism through action. We must maintain and disseminate our commitment to the principles of the Charter. History will judge us by this. Our greatest achievements are from unity, for United We Stand, Divided We Fall.

God bless you and God bless the United Nations.