



PERMANENT MISSION  
OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON THE OCCASION OF THE GENERAL DEBATE  
AT THE 63<sup>RD</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STATEMENT BY  
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PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President,  
Mr. Secretary General,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I join previous speakers in offering you, Mr. President, my warm congratulations on your election to the Presidency of the General Assembly.

Mr. President

As this is first time that I am here to address this august Assembly, whose main objectives include the promotion of democracy and economic self-reliance, I am happy to say that the Kingdom of Tonga has been undertaking some historical and fundamental economic and political reforms over the past few years.

Mr. President,

Eight years ago, the United Nations (UN) adopted the historical Millennium Declaration, offering new hopes to people living in poverty around the world.

Yesterday we met to review the progress which we have made to date. This mid term review provides us with yet another opportunity to assess our overall achievements, draw attention to the constraints and gaps, and to renew our political commitment to the achievement of the targets that we had set for 2015.

While some progress has been made globally in regards to poverty reduction its sustainability has been challenged by several factors including the rising cost of energy and food, and the limited availability of financial resources.

Mr. President,

Hardship and poverty have traditionally not been an issue of serious concern in the Kingdom of Tonga, but they are now becoming one. External influences are changing people's attitudes and aspirations, straining the traditional Tongan social system in which everyone's needs were met by the community as a whole. A recent study has found that, although there are no families living in absolute poverty, there is a small proportion of the population living in hardship. Population growth, changes in lifestyle, and the gradual breakdown of the traditional social and family systems have contributed to these increased hardships. But the main cause has been our lack of foresight, drive and determination to retain much of that traditional spirit of self-reliance and self-sufficiency that had served us well for centuries. This is the main challenge for Tonga today – to be more self-reliant and more self-sufficient, given the natural resources readily available to us within our own national borders.

Mr. President,

The main theme of this session as " The impact of the global food crises on poverty and hunger in the world" is most timely. We all should look upon these crises as an unique opportunity to redouble our efforts and refocus on policy actions that would help boost agricultural production in order to

build greater self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Development aid can assist, but in the long-term, there is no substitute for a more dynamic and productive agricultural sector.

Greater Self-reliance is the ultimate goal that the Kingdom of Tonga strives for.

Tonga's performance under the UN Human Development Index continues to reflect a high level of expenditure and investment in the social sectors including health and education. The UN Human Development report for 2008 ranks Tonga 55<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries.

Tonga has achieved targets such as universal primary education and gender equality through the provision of free primary school education.

Mr. President,

Tonga shares the concern you expressed about the impact of Climate Change on small island States during your opening statement on assuming the Presidency last week, in which you emphasized that the negotiations process on agreed long-term actions initiated in Bali, "...must be guided by a single consideration: saving those small island States that today live in danger of disappearing entirely as nations. This is the real challenge of our day and this should be our immediate concern." And so it should. For, already, the prospect of climate refugees from some of the Pacific Island Forum countries is no longer a prospect but a reality, with relocations of communities due to sea level rise already taking place. Urgent action must be taken now.

The Leaders of the Pacific Island Forum countries endorsed for the first time a regional Declaration on Climate Change, as part of its annual Communiqué, in Niue last month. The Niue Declaration duly recognizes the serious current impacts and growing threat posed by climate change to economic, social, cultural and environmental well being as well as the security of Pacific Island countries.

As such, the Pacific Small Island Developing States will introduce a draft resolution entitled "Climate Change and Security" during the current session of the General Assembly. I commend the draft resolution to Member States for their consideration and support.

Tonga welcomes the resources and technical assistance that will become available from initiatives such as Japan's 'Cool Earth' Promotion Programme, the European Union's Global Climate Change Alliance, Australia's climate adaptation programme for the Pacific, and the increase in New Zealand's financial support for climate change adaptation.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the normalization of relations between Nuku'alofa and Beijing. This milestone has reaffirmed Tonga's commitment to the observance of the 'One China' policy with the state of relations and economic cooperation between our two countries continuing to flourish and prosper.

Mr. President,

Tonga welcomes the reform process and debates under way in many international institutions. We share the view that the UN has a unique role and legitimacy, and acknowledge the reforms that are

occurring to strengthen the coherence of the UN system and the efficacy of its development and humanitarian activities in particular. It is vital that the UN continue to develop a global framework of rules and collective action in an inclusive and democratic way. As a member of the Commonwealth, Tonga joined others in Kampala in 2007, and most recently in London earlier this year, in expressing concern that the current architecture of international institutions does not respond adequately to the challenges facing the small island states and environmental governance.

The longstanding debate, now over 10 years old, on the reform of the Security Council remains fraught with uncertainty and an inability to reach agreement on improving fundamental aspects of the Council including the question of equitable representation and an increase in its membership. The forthcoming intergovernmental negotiations present a further opportunity for Member States to advance this debate to a successful conclusion. Tonga continues to maintain its support for Japan's proper and permanent place in any enhanced Council.

Mr. President,

Last year, we provided from this podium details of how our Legislative Assembly approved a timetable for the implementation of reforms by 2010 leading to greater democratization of our political system.

His Majesty, King George Tupou V, is the driving force guiding the political reform process on which we have embarked as a nation. He holds the strong view that the Monarchy is an instrument of change and not an obstacle to it. He has, for some years, therefore, encouraged Government to take the necessary measures to bring about a more democratic form of Government – one that would be in line with the aspirations of his people and with the changing circumstances of our globalized world.

In July this year, Royal Assent was granted to the *Constitution and Electoral Commission Act 2008*. Its main task is to consider the constitutional and electoral implications of the resolutions of the Legislative Assembly, and draft the necessary bills for consideration and enactment.

Mr. President,

Tonga was the first Pacific State to present its national report under the Universal Periodic Review process of the Human Rights Council during its second session in May and June 2008. I wish to thank New Zealand for assisting in the funding of the preparation of the report, and also to those Member States who took the opportunity to contribute constructively to the review dialogue on the human rights situation in Tonga, as well as those Member States who made pledges of financial and technical support.

Mr. President,

In our globalized world, no sovereign nation can achieve its goals of progress, peace and security on its own, and neither can the Kingdom of Tonga. Constructive and active engagement in regional and international affairs through bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms, with the United

Nations at the centre, and greater, yet appropriate, integration into the global economy will thus continue to be the cornerstone of Tonga's foreign policy.

As a member of the United Nations, Tonga wishes to reaffirm its commitment to continuing its active involvement in the work of the United Nations as the central coordinating body of common efforts of the family of nations to which we all belong.

Mr. President, I thank you for your attention.