



TUVALU

STATEMENT

Delivered by

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Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tuvalu

at the

63rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Open Debate

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Mr President,

Distinguished Heads of States and Government

Secretary General of the United Nations

Ladies and Gentlemen

Being the first time to stand on this podium before this august body, I am greatly honoured by this opportunity to speak on behalf of the people and Government of Tuvalu.

Next week, on the 1st of October, Tuvalu will commemorate its Thirtieth Anniversary of Independence. While we take pride in chartering forward in nationhood, as a small and young nation, we have full confidence in the noble goals of the United Nations, to guide us through the waters of our destiny. Our presence here in the UN is our statement of hope and trust in the goodwill of humanity.

Let me on this occasion express Tuvalu's deep appreciation to all Members of the international community for your invaluable support to my nation of Tuvalu, and to convey their warmest greetings and felicitations to the Sixty-third Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I wish also to associate ourselves with previous speakers in extending our congratulations to you, Mr President, on your election. And expressing our appreciation to your predecessor, particularly in promoting the issue of climate change, among others, within the UN General Assembly agenda.

Mr President,

Climate change is, without doubt, the most serious threat to the global security and survival of mankind. It is an issue of enormous concern to a highly vulnerable small island State like Tuvalu. Here in this Great House, we now know both the science and economics of climate change. We also know the cause of climate change, and that human actions by ALL countries are urgently needed to address it.

The central message of both the IPCC reports and the Sir Nicholas Stern reports on climate change to us, world leaders, is crystal clear: *unless urgent actions are done to curb greenhouse gasses emissions by shifting to a new global energy mix based on renewable energy sources, and unless timely adaptation is done, the adverse impacts of climate change on all communities, will be catastrophic.*

This Great Family, the United Nations, must not fail to take heed of these timely warnings, and to save us all, particularly the small and most vulnerable, from this man-made catastrophe.

Mr President

The next 12 to 18 months are crucial in the context of negotiating a new international agreement on climate change based on the Bali Action Plan. We must work together to ensure that all countries make a substantial effort to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

We need to find the right incentives to ensure that all countries contribute to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This requires a collective effort of substantial proportions. It also requires strong political leadership. Tuvalu observes with some great disappointment the clear absence of this leadership particularly emerging from the recently concluded G-8 Summit. We need short stringent, short term targets by all major developed countries.

Based on the principles of polluter pays and common but differentiated responsibilities, the industrialised world must show strong leadership in advancing real actions on climate change. But ALL countries must also act. In the little way we can, we in SIDS are also committed to contributing to emission reduction through use of renewable energy.

While we call for urgent action to reduce emissions, Mr President, we know the impacts of climate change are upon us. For a highly vulnerable small coral atoll nation like Tuvalu, the consequences of the impacts of climate change are frightening. The survival and security, along with fundamental human rights, and the cultural identity of our entire nation is under threat and Tuvalu is right on the edge of existence. Climate change could well push us over that edge.

Mr President

Last year Tuvalu produced an International Blueprint on Adaptation which we presented as a submission to the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.¹ This Blueprint highlights a number of areas where we envisage greater collaboration within the UN system. Let me highlight a few of these.

¹ International Blueprint on Adaptation

URL: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2007/cop13/eng/misc02.pdf>

First, it is very clear that financial resources for adaptation are completely inadequate. Last year Oxfam International suggested that the adaptation needs of developing countries will cost a minimum of \$US50 billion per year. We must work together to find these additional funds. One means of increasing the funding for adaptation is through the creation of what we call a Burden Sharing Mechanism. Funding for this Mechanism could come from levies on the share of proceeds from emissions trading and international aviation and maritime transport.

We also believe *new and additional sources* of funding must be identified and channelled through the recently established Adaptation Fund to help fund concrete adaptation projects in-country to adapt to the impacts of climate change, while ensuring long term survival and livelihoods in our God given lands. While we welcome therefore the recent launch of several new funding initiatives on climate change, we must caution against the fragmentation of international efforts, and the need, not to do more studies, but to fulfil obligations to urgently save those inflicted by climate change.

Second, we need collaborative action among UN institutions and NGOs to develop a comprehensive approach to long-term adaptation action. As a first step we believe that a special coordination committee should be established under the auspices of the UN General Assembly.

Third, the Blueprint also proposes the establishment of an International Climate Insurance Pool. This would be an internationally sourced pool of funds for an insurance mechanism to provide support to the most vulnerable communities to meet the costs of rebuilding after climate-related disasters.

Mr President,

These are only three ideas we have elaborated in our Blueprint. There are a number of others. We encourage you, Mr President, to closely look at the Blueprint and develop these ideas further.

We strongly believe that it is the political and moral responsibility of the world, particularly those who caused the problem, to save small islands and countries like Tuvalu from climate change, and ensure that we continue to live in our home islands with long term security, cultural identity, and fundamental human dignity. Forcing us to leave our islands due to the inaction of those responsible is immoral, and cannot be used as quick fix solutions to the problem.

In all this context, therefore, Tuvalu also strongly supports the resolution on security and climate change tabled by the Pacific small island developing States to be re-introduced in this 63rd session. We urge others to co-sponsor and properly address the issues raised in this very important resolution.

Mr President

Tuvalu recently attended the High Level Conference on World Food Security. We share the grave concern about the current global issue of high food prices, food shortages and their associated social problems for humanity which is made worst by high fuel costs.

We highly commend the initiative taken by the UN Secretary General in establishing a High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis and the formulation of a Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA). We sincerely hope that this framework will produce concrete results in countries on food security.

Mr President,

One of the most sensitive issues for small and vulnerable island developing States like Tuvalu, has been the lack of recognition of our unique vulnerability in considering the question of graduation from Least Developed Country status.

Our economic and environmental vulnerability cannot be ignored. The enormous threat of more severe weather events and sea level rise hangs over us like a large storm cloud. This threat hinders investment in our country and potentially puts into question our very survival. We therefore make a strong and heartfelt appeal to this great Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and our development partners to carefully reconsider the criteria for LDC graduation.

Two issues are of particular concerns. First, it is remarkable that nearly all recent or potential graduation cases have been small islands including my own country Tuvalu. The small island States which are also LDCs eligible for graduation all have the common features of improved income per capita, and improved human assets.

They also have in common the fact that they have been economically and environmentally highly vulnerable. But this vital criterion of vulnerability does not seem serious enough. In short, our countries are or could be losing LDC status because they have made progress on income per capita, despite the fact that the sustainability of this income is challenged by our vulnerability.

My second point has to do with the serious lack of coherence within the UN system. The high vulnerability of SIDS has been, for several years, recognized and reiterated in many different UN circles, in Rio, Barbados and Mauritius, and Johannesburg, and in several major UN events including the MDGs Summit Declaration.

Yet, this special vulnerability has never been seriously given recognition in the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, let alone as the main criterion of LDC graduation.

I therefore call on the UN to seriously work toward a reform of the graduation rule whereby no LDC that is recognized as highly vulnerable, should be forced to lose LDC status.

Mr President

Tuvalu wishes to commend the ongoing reforms within the United Nations, but to note also with grave concern that progress is slow. We clearly need a restructuring and expansion of the Security Council to properly reflect regional balance, to take a fresh look at the membership, so that the Council can properly address emerging global peace and security challenges, including climate change. We believe also a seat should be allocated for a representative from a small island developing State in the reformed Security Council.

In the broader context of UN reforms, I support the Secretary General's remarks that *"Our changing world needs a stronger UN. We need to move faster. We need to pay less attention to rhetoric and more attention to results - to getting things done."* I couldn't agree more. To this end I appeal again to the UN for the earliest establishment of its joint presence office in Tuvalu, to facilitate better coordination of UN interventions.

Mr President

Tuvalu strongly believes that nations have the right to self determination. The United Nations must uphold this principle. Therefore we believe it is time that the United Nations properly addressed the issue of Taiwan's meaningful participation at the UN specialised agencies.

My government strongly supports Taiwan's aspirations to meaningfully participate in the United Nations and its specialised agencies, recognising Taiwan's own political and economic achievements, and constructive contribution to international development,

trade, health, education and technology. We strongly appeal that Taiwan's aspirations to participate as a full member of specialised agencies of the UN is given proper and urgent attention.

Mr President

Finally, our story on the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is mixed. For small island developing States like Tuvalu, addressing our sustainable development challenges are not simply poverty reduction. It is MDGs - plus. We need significant increase in direct financing, technology, and capacity development more than ever, as recognised under the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation to cope with our unique island challenges.

In conclusion, my government firmly believes that the next twelve months will be an extremely critical time in the UN's history. We must act promptly and decisively to address climate change, achieve Millennium Development Goals, and to respond to the global crisis on food and energy. These issues are closely linked. We must rise to these challenges.

God Bless the United Nations. TUVALU MO TE ATUA.

I thank you.