



Permanent Mission of Samoa to the United Nations

685 Third Avenue, 11th Floor, Suite 1102 New York, N.Y 10017

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF SAMOA, HON FIAME NAOMI
MATAAFA: GENERAL DEBATE of the 79th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY, NEW YORK, Friday 27 September 2024**

Excellencies,

I extend my congratulations to His Excellency, Mr. Philemon Yang of Cameroon on the assumption of the Presidency of the 79th Session of the General Assembly. The theme of your Presidency is one which resonates with us as we strive to navigate a path towards a more peaceful, more sustainable and more resilient future for our peoples and planet. Please be assured of Samoa's support in the successful execution of your mandate.

The effects of climate change are being lived in real time. We're not even at the end of 2024, yet we've witnessed countries in all corners of the globe endure extreme weather events. From ferocious wildfires to devastating floods and scorching heatwaves. In July this year we saw the earliest Category 5 Hurricane Beryl hit the Caribbean with such ferocity causing devastation and even parts of Mexico, Venezuela and the US.

Our collective efforts must not end at national borders. In our most difficult times, it is easy to abandon the collective to safeguard the individual. But history reminds us of the folly of that approach.

Climate change remains one of the gravest concerns for all countries, especially SIDS; its impacts are more extensively felt due to our special circumstances and the lack of capacity to respond quickly and effectively. Unless substantial investments are made to mitigate climate change, boost adaptation, and build more resilient economies, we face urgent climate and financial risks.

Climate change also has significant security implications for our food, water and energy supplies, competition over natural resources, loss of livelihoods, climate-related disasters, and potentially forced migration.

We must do more to turn the tide, to honour our commitments and obligations, and to take urgent and ambitious climate action now.

Our expectations for the upcoming COP29 in Azerbaijan, include securing an agreement on an NCQG that is truly fit for purpose. It is time to review the outcomes of the first global stocktake to ensure that new NDCs due in 2025 are as ambitious as possible.

Excellencies,

We must keep global temperatures below 1.5 degrees Celsius. This is a red line for many SIDS like Samoa.

In this era of unprecedented sea level rise international law must evolve to meet the climate crisis and the disproportionate effect it has on SIDs. Earlier this week AOSIS Leaders adopted a Declaration of sea level Rise and statehood. The declaration provides affirmation that international law is based on the fundamental principle of the continuity of states. Our statehood and sovereignty cannot be challenged. No matter the physical changes wrought by the climate crisis, we will remain sovereign states unless we choose otherwise.

As part of the Blue Pacific continent, Samoa is committed to ensuring that our ocean spaces, resources and ecosystems remain healthy for current and future generations. We have witnessed many demands on our marine resources from a variety of sectors. Cognizant of the threats that such demands and pressures place on these critical resources, we launched the Samoa Ocean Strategy (SOS) in 2020, our national policy framework that seeks to sustainably manage Samoa's vast ocean and marine resources. The Strategy provides bold and comprehensive integrated ocean management solutions to advance ocean stewardship and ensure that cultural and economic values that Samoans derive from the ocean continue to be available to all generations.

Stewardship of the ocean extends beyond our national boundaries. In this regard, Samoa is working towards ratification of the BBNJ Agreement while continuing to engage regionally and internationally on advocacy of ocean health and sustainability of our marine ecosystems, including fisheries resources. We call on our partners to continue working with us to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing which deprives us of resource benefits and undermines our management efforts.

We continue to engage in the work of the INC for an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution. For Samoa, the need to address the global plastic pollution problem, especially in the marine environment, is a priority.

Excellencies,

We need to protect our biodiversity both terrestrial and marine. Healthy biological diversity maintains the web of life that we rely on, such as food, water, medicine, economic growth, and sustainable livelihoods.

The protection of our mangroves and reef systems increases the resilience to climate change-driven erosion and flooding, supporting healthy ecosystems and the sustainable well-being of coastal communities.

Our experience with the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us to be better prepared for global pandemics.

Non-communicable diseases are a priority concern and accounts for much of the burden of diseases in Samoa. Chronic NCDs are overtaking communicable diseases as the dominant health problem, and are the leading causes of mortality, morbidity and disability. At the national level - NCDs account for almost half of the deaths and premature deaths at that in Samoa

Excellencies,

Food security is a priority that requires the transformation of our food system. We must return to locally produced quality fresh foods with less reliance on processed

imported foods. As important is the need to address the balance of issues of access, affordability, and convenience against quality and wellbeing.

In last May, we met in Antigua and Barbuda for the 4th SIDS Conference where we adopted the ABAS, a ten-year action plan for our sustainable development. SIDS are in the crossfire of multiple crises: climate change, the economic and social repercussions of COVID-19, which many of us still haven't fully recovered from.

We face a unique set of vulnerabilities which impede our ability to achieve sustainable development. Most SIDS, like Samoa, face high indebtedness compounded every time there is a natural disaster. These disasters will only increase and intensify as long as climate change remains unaddressed. The work of the Systematic Observations Financing Facility and the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership in this space is much appreciated and fully supported by SIDS.

Samoa looks forward to the timely and effective implementation of the MVI by International Financial Institutions and our development partners as a tool to assist SIDS in accessing finance. I am determined in this call, not only as Prime Minister of my country but as Chair of AOSIS.

In July this year Samoa presented its 3rd Voluntary National Review report to the HighLevel Political Forum. Its focus is on the continued commitment of the Government to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at a pace commensurate with our prioritization, resource availability and active engagement of our communities. Samoa continues to place emphasis on achieving the SDGs through a balancing of the strengths of our culture and society, transformative reforms, effective resource mobilization and the careful management of our natural environment.

Excellencies,

The Global Digital Compact has been a focus of this year's Summit of the Future aimed at establishing a comprehensive framework for the governance of digital technologies and the internet.

We request that support for SIDS include capacity building, technical assistance, and strengthening digital infrastructure through cyber security measures and educational initiatives for public and private enterprises.

The successful implementation of the Digital Compact will require a coordinated and multi-faceted approach, with the assistance of UN entities and development partners in applying the principles to our national context as well as to the regional and global levels.

Samoa remains a peaceful country, committed to justice and the protection of human rights. We remain concerned that the wars in Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza and surrounding areas are still ongoing with no resolution in sight. The terrible loss of civilian lives, displacement of people as well as the destruction of infrastructure and the environment is something we do not condone. The provision of arms to these conflicts needs to cease. Arms and weapons only fuel more death and destruction.

The UN can play a greater role in finding a path towards peace and we are committed to the collective responsibility of the global community to achieve this through international cooperation and diplomacy.

2025 being the 80th year of the UN anniversary presents an opportunity all of us to seriously consider reforms of the Security Council. We must consider the expansion of both the permanent and non-permanent seats of the Security Council to enhance the representation of the underrepresented and unrepresented regions.

Excellencies,

The more things change, the more we cannot afford to stay the same. The tools of a foregone era can no longer ensure our future. The complexity of the challenges that beset us requires a greater understanding of the challenges themselves, as well as those being challenged. Samoa remains committed to the United Nations and our conviction that it remains the foremost forum to address all international issues. Faafetai