



**Statement by Honourable Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister of  
the Independent State of Samoa at The General Debate, 77<sup>th</sup> United  
Nations General Assembly, New York, 23 September 2022**

---

**Mr President,**

**Distinguished delegates,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I extend Samoa's congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Csaba Körösi on your assumption of the Presidency of the 77th Session of the General Assembly. Please be assured of Samoa's full support in the successful execution of your mandate over the next 12 months.

**Mr President,**

It is an honour for me to address this Assembly in-person as Samoa's Prime Minister as part of the year long celebratory events of our 60th Independence anniversary since we became independent in 1962.

Samoa has for decades championed the importance of the rule of law and protection of human rights. Many labelled the events that unfolded following our 2021 elections a constitutional crisis. While these were difficult times for Samoa, they were also key to our forward journey as a maturing democracy.

It divided our country and tested the key pillars of our society - our faith, our culture, and the rule of law. However, my delivering this statement today as the first female Prime Minister of Samoa and bringing about a change in government after four decades, are testament to the fact that the

rule of law has prevailed. Samoa today remains peaceful and stable; despite all the challenges we lived through. My government will continue to safeguard the rights of all its citizens especially the most vulnerable, by strengthening appropriate social protection measures and prioritising assistance for those, most in need. We have focused on people centred development as pivotal to the implementation of our development agenda over the next five years.

Samoa presented its third Universal Periodic Review in November 2021. We maintain that our Christian values, unique culture, and traditions complement our human rights obligations and fundamental freedoms which we have committed to promote, respect, protect and fulfil.

### **Mr President, (SDGs)**

As we take stock of the global challenges we face we highlight the need for sustainable measures to address post-covid economic recovery, urge all nations to resolve and work towards peace and security, enhance resilience from climate change impacts, as well as achieving our Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. The theme of this year's General Debate "**A watershed moment: transformative solutions to interlocking challenges**" resonates with Samoa as we clearly recognise that the world is at a critical moment in the history of the United Nations due to complex and interconnected crises. We need an effective United Nations to mobilize our collective efforts and to propel urgent actions to address these issues.

The achievement of the SDGs must be the driving force in our collective efforts over the next eight years. Together we must elevate our actions with urgency to address the climate emergency, or our planet will be lost to us and to future generations. Though far removed from the centres of conflict, resultant escalating fuel and food prices and threats of nuclear weapons use have reached our isolation. Yet no one empathises with the war, climate is waging on atoll islanders watching their maritime boundaries disappear fast with sea level rise.

Samoa stands ready to meet its obligations and commitments in achieving the SDGs. There is a need to strengthen capacity building at all levels, enhance data and information collection and storage through national and regional climate change portals as well as invest in robust systems and processes, including reporting and verification, and knowledge brokerage. Improving resilience actions through learning and developing knowledge societies will enable adaptation and responsiveness to future crises.

**Mr President, (UN reforms)**

Both the global financial and governance systems are desperately in need of reform. As the UN Secretary-General lucidly puts it, the global financial system is morally bankrupt, and it favours the rich and punishes the poor. This must change. The approval and effective implementation of the multidimensional vulnerability index will be a move in the right direction in addressing this imbalance and make the global financial architecture fit for purpose, by tackling the SIDS' financing gaps. The full support of all our development partners, international financial institutions

and multilateral development banks is critical in ensuring the effective implementation of the MVI.

**Mr President, (Vulnerabilities and MVI)**

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face a unique set of vulnerabilities which impede their ability to achieve sustainable development. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated those vulnerabilities with many SIDS countries being particularly affected by the drop in international tourism and remittances. Consequently, the timely call for and endorsement of a multi-dimensional vulnerability index will allow for the inclusion of more than just income-based criteria to assess eligibility for concessional finance.

A universal MVI could be viewed as the foundation upon which the key principles guiding specific responses to our vulnerabilities are anchored. It is an option and not a hindrance. It should be perceived as the landing zone upon which specific responses could be framed depending on the circumstances involved. It is a tool that provides for a richer lens on vulnerability and resilience hence its adoption and full implementation is critical for our economic recovery.

**Mr President, (Climate Change)**

Climate change remains our number one priority. The scientific evidence is clear and irrefutable. For Pacific communities, the main challenge is securing action for survival, and we all need to shoulder our responsibilities and play our part. The big polluters and emitters have a moral obligation and responsibility to meet their commitments ahead of

COP27. Why? Because they hold the key to our achieving the 1.5-degree promise of the Paris Agreement. We call on all parties to commit to more ambitious NDCs to meet the Paris Agreement promise as we are all part of the solution.

Our global commitment to implement the Paris Agreement is critical. Even with limiting warming to 1.5 degrees SIDS will continue to incur severe loss and damage. We must therefore promote recovery investments that are climate smart, resilient, and in line with net zero emissions by 2050.

We are at the doorstep of COP27, we must work diligently to generate solutions to meet expectations. The achievement of a 50/50 split between mitigation and adaptation funding is of paramount importance to Samoa and SIDS. We should not put out the flame for Loss and Damage.

Natural disasters continue to devastate countless lives. Recent climate events are transboundary and drive home the reality that no country is immune to the impacts of climate change. These environmental threats will worsen. The triple planetary crisis is the alarm knell that is reminding us we are putting immeasurable pressure on the planet. Our relentless need to extract resources from nature is causing disruptions propelling climate change, destroying nature, and raising pollution levels

Any response programmes must be informed by our commitment to science for informed policy; and law and institutions that strengthen environmental governance. We seek to further enable change through transformations in finance and economic systems; and by leveraging data and technology for the environment. Small island developing states like Samoa do not always

have the requisite levels of capabilities and capacity to repurpose and redirect financial and economic systems towards sustainability, improve the effectiveness of legal frameworks, deliver science as the catalyst for action and be digitally connected.

**Mr President,** (Oceans)

The ocean is in us and we are the ocean. It is the lifeblood of our Blue Pacific nations – the lungs of our planet. But whilst its sustainable use provides a strategic pathway towards our sustainable development, we must also address the associated risks. The health of the ocean is a key priority challenge. We must therefore continue to advance work on the ocean-climate nexus such as through empowering women, girls and youth with relevant knowledge and skills to contribute to the health of the ocean.

The recent Ocean Conference in Palau and the 2<sup>nd</sup> UN Oceans Conference in Lisbon were opportunities to take stock of the SDG14 and we welcome the call for more investment in making the ocean and its resources more sustainable. Of all the SDGs, Life below Water is the most under-funded. This must change. We need to attract and retain sustainable and innovative investment, including foreign direct investment through blending, guarantees and other innovative financial instruments.

Our global community must focus on the work that remains to be accomplished. Pledges and commitments made at these two conferences and COP26 are inconsequential if they are not delivered on time to effect actions on the ground.

Samoa's marine protection goals outlined in our first Ocean Strategy are aligned to the Blue Leaders 30 x 30 campaign, as well as calls for protecting 30% of our global oceans by 2030. We welcome the complementarity of such initiatives and encourage others to join.

The Pacific Ocean hosts a remarkable array of biodiversity. With our Blue Pacific family, Samoa continues to prioritize both marine and terrestrial ecosystems' restoration. We remain engaged in the Convention on the Biological Diversity process. Together with the UNFCCC COP27, 2022 is a critical year for aligning action to tackle the climate emergency, and addressing the threats posed by bio-diversity loss.

The Pacific SIDS subscribe to the position that preserving maritime zones and the rights and entitlements that flow from them give expression not only to the foundation principles of equity and stability, but also to the notion of climate justice deeply rooted in human rights and the principles of international law. In this vein we urge all member states to inject urgency into efforts to conclude negotiations on the BBNJ instrument. Samoa pledges its support to the Vanuatu ICJ initiative for an Advisory Opinion on climate change

### **Mr President, (Plastics Pollution)**

We must unite to prevent and reduce marine pollution including plastics, oil spills, waste discharge and nuclear contaminants. If we continue down this current path, we will fish out of our oceans more plastics than fish. Pacific SIDS contribute less than 1.3 per cent of the mismanaged plastics in

the world's oceans yet are one of the main recipients of plastics pollution and its impacts.

The effects of overfishing, and IUU fishing is a major concern for Pacific economies. Lost revenues are in the billions. The increased acidification of our ocean is already destroying entire reef ecosystems. Reef damage affects fish population which in turn affects entire fisheries upon which we rely for our livelihoods

**Mr President, (food security and health)**

The Global food system is at a critical stage made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, the onslaught of climate change, and the ongoing war in Ukraine. The Food Systems Summit held last year mobilized the global community to find transformative solutions. Samoa was pleased to be part of that important event which encouraged shared exploration of potentials for collective action.

Through organized dialogues, Samoa benefited from a comprehensive assessment of the issues involved in building the sustainability of our food systems. Access to a balanced and nutritional diet is crucial and requires a return to locally produced quality fresh foods and less of processed imported foods. This will be key to addressing the rising burden of Non-Communicable Diseases which represent the single largest cause of premature mortality in the Pacific countries including Samoa. With support from our development partners, the Samoa government launched the first comprehensive NCD control program among Pacific Island countries, in May 2020; its aim is to build people centered and systematic NCD service



provision in Samoa to strengthen the primary health care, empower community participation, promote early detection and effective referral of NCDs, and increase population awareness of NCD risk factors.

**Mr President, (peace and security)**

We continue to call for a future of peaceful and open societies, free from wars, nuclear weapons, and the threat of terrorism.

The Boe Declaration defines for the Pacific what constitutes security concerns. These are primarily non-conventional in nature ranging from climate to environmental and resource security, human and cyber security, and transnational crimes. The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific adopted by Forum Leaders at their July 2022 meeting will support and strengthen the key tenets of the Boe Declaration.

While Samoa welcomes development partners on our terms, we note with concern the ongoing geopolitical posturing in our region and urge for our national and collective interests to be placed at the forefront, for a peaceful and secure Blue Pacific Continent.

We are concerned about the serious shortfalls in the implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty noting that nuclear weapon states have spent billions of dollars on modernizing and maintaining their nuclear arsenals rather than spending on helping victims of past use and testing of nuclear weapons, and focusing on achieving sustainable development goals. The increasing use of ICT has raised issues of security and privacy. The online cyber-criminal activities have increased, including the dissemination and misuse of information.

We rely on our collective responsibility as a global community to prevent and combat high-tech cyber and electronic crimes. Samoa believes these are crucial processes at the multilateral in ensuring that cyberspace is safe for All. We therefore need to work together to combat and eliminate these destabilising activities.

**Mr President, (SIDS and Sustainable Development)**

Accelerated action to meet the promise of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs is an imperative. COVID-19 and climate change have uprooted and even reversed hard fought development gains. However, we must persist to meet the SDGs as they provide the best option for a brighter future and countering the threats posed by the climate crisis.

We should not forget the commitments and undertakings made towards the full implementation of the SAMOA Pathway. I thank all SIDS partners, the Secretary-General for their continuous support and commitment to this task. The proposed monitoring framework for the SAMOA Pathway is a necessary tool for follow-up action and review allowing for effective resource allocation and accountability. Outstanding issues relating to the framework must be concluded with urgency considering the fast-approaching timeline set out in the Secretary-General's report on this matter as well as the fast-approaching timeline of the 2024 SIDS conference.

**Mr President, (Economic Outlook)**

No country should be placed in a situation of choosing between rebuilding their economy and servicing their debt obligations. The March 2021 IMF

report noted that SIDS simply cannot support their SDGs and fund their core needs on their own under the prevailing conditions of economic contraction.

Tourism may never return to pre-COVID-19 levels. Aviation services will be slow to recover, and one casualty of the pandemic, in our case, was the recent demise of our national airline, Samoa Airways.

Many Pacific Island countries rely on remittances from diasporas and communities. Apart from being an important source of income for families and foreign exchange reserves for governments, remittances are an important buffer in periods of economic shocks and natural disasters. Yet the cost of sending remittances to the Pacific is over 10% which is higher than the global average and 7% higher than the target set by the SDGs.

### **Mr President, (Recovery options)**

According to the 2021 IMF Report, the Pacific region is in a recession. Income, demand for regional exports, tourism receipts have all recorded reductions whilst public spending continues on an upward trajectory. The projected outcome is a greater risk of debt distress. It is also the case that most of the Pacific debts are with multilateral agencies. Whilst the adoption of austerity measures is an option, there is also the real possibility that this may worsen poverty and undermine economic recovery.

Multilateralism and united international cooperation are our best response to the many threats we face and building resilience at the national level can only take us so far. Samoa is confident that despite all the challenges, even existential threats for some of us; there is still hope if there

is Unity amongst our UN family. We need to change our world for the better and leave hope for our future generations.

**Mr President, (Digitalisation)**

The COVID 19 situation, forcing border lockdowns and State of Emergency restrictions further emphasize the importance of digitalization for SIDS, to build resilience and meet the sustainable development goals.

Samoa will continue to prioritize the need to invest in digital technologies and to promote a digital economy and connectivity. This is key to stimulating business opportunities and increasing productivity and growth in more traditional sectors such as agriculture and tourism. Investment in innovation and digitalization for Samoa, can enable more efficient delivery of health and education; improve connectivity between rural and urban communities; advance economic empowerment for women and youth; and assist with more efficient public service delivery.

To fully realize the benefits of a digital economy, Samoans must be able to connect with and trust the technology; an enabling business environment must be in place, and investment in education, skills, and digital literacy is paramount. The availability of fast, reliable, and affordable internet services to government, the business community and the public is crucial.

In the agriculture and health sectors, we are investing in digital solutions for contact tracing and for information sharing between farmers. We recently launched our e-Health System to improve medical record keeping and strengthen health information and vital statistics. More importantly, as we expect increasing health security threats, this e-Health System will be vital

to protecting health and wellbeing and enhance the resilience of our population.

Our experiences with COVID 19 and ongoing fight with climate change reinforces our conviction of the importance of technology and online distance learning to provide access to quality education for all.

We should not lose sight of the fact that, while pursuing these home-grown solutions, we do not end up creating disparity between those who can and cannot access and afford these solutions. But I am convinced, that embracing technology and knowledge sharing for our people, will be powerful drivers for change, innovation, and welfare.

### **Mr President, (Our Common agenda)**

Our Common Agenda highlights the urgency of reforming our global governance system. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is upending our world, threatening our health, destroying economies and livelihoods and deepening poverty and inequalities. Increasingly, people are turning their backs on the values of trust and solidarity in one another – the very values we need to rebuild our world and secure a better, more sustainable future for our people and our planet. We agreed that our challenges are interconnected, across borders and all other divides and can only be addressed by an equally interconnected response, through reinvigorated multilateralism and the United Nations at the centre of our efforts.

**Our Common Agenda** is, above all, an agenda of action designed to accelerate the implementation of existing agreements, including the Sustainable Development Goals and is our road map to recapture this

positive spirit and begin rebuilding our world and mending the trust in one another that is needed at this moment in history.

Like the Security Council and the global financial system, Samoa is convinced that now is the opportune moment to bring about reforms that would make our global response to future crises and emergencies more effective, timely, and that an all-UN institutional approach is a necessity.

**Mr President,**

In conclusion, let me end, by reaffirming Samoa's commitment to the United Nations and our conviction that it remains the foremost forum to address all issues that transcend national boundaries.

As we look to the future, the collective hope for humanity is for Leaders to take the tough decisions for the health of our planet. Entrenched positions devoid of today's realities and in pursuit of unrelated agendas do not have a place in our collective efforts. While we need to make bold and courageous decisions, let us protect the safety nets crucial to our existence. There is a saying in my country that reads 'aua le naunau ile I'a ae maumau ai le upega' which translates to 'hunger not for the fish at the risk of ruining your net.

Soifua.