



**Statement
by
Honourable Fiame Naomi Mataafa
Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa
at the General Debate,
76th United Nations General Assembly
Saturday 25 September 2021 (Virtual- New York Time)**

Mr. President,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Samoa extends its congratulations and best wishes to His Excellency Abdulla Shahid on your assumption of the Presidency of the 76th Session of the General Assembly. We are indeed delighted to see Maldives, a sister small island developing state, taking the reins of our organization at this critical and pivotal moment in our history. Please be assured of Samoa's full support in the successful execution of your mandate over the next 12 months. We also welcome the re-appointment of Secretary General Antonio Guterres for a second term and have confidence in his continued leadership at this critical time for the United Nations.

It is an honour to address this Assembly for the first time as Samoa's Prime Minister, although it is regrettable that this must take place virtually, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In these times of uncertainty, the leaders of the world must remain connected in our fight for a just, more sustainable and peaceful future for our people and planet. There have been many challenges over the recent past,

and we need to take urgent action now on a host of them. COVID19 and its constant mutations threatening lives; the looming existential threat from the climate crisis; the accelerated loss of biodiversity; the erosion of human rights; worsening conflicts; rising discrimination and hatred; the abuse of information and new technologies are but a few of the mammoth tasks that lie ahead of us.

As the UN Secretary General highlighted in his "Our Common Agenda" report, we are at an inflection point in history. We either breakdown or breakthrough. I believe, we should not surrender to a future of perpetual crises but choose hope through urgent, decisive and united action. The theme for this year's UNGA captures the essence of Samoa's immediate priorities in alignment with our United Nations family. We need to rebuild sustainably for recovery from the pandemic, and to enhance resilience. We must revitalize the United Nations. The experience of the last 18 months has clearly demonstrated that now, more than ever, we need an effective United Nations to mobilize our collective efforts, to propel urgent actions, in order to effectively address these problems.

Excellencies,

There is no greater challenge confronting the global community now than that of climate change. For Pacific communities, the real challenge is not about securing more scientific evidence, setting new global targets, and more talk shops. It is about action for survival and we all need to shoulder our responsibilities and play our part. The big polluters and emitters need to demonstrate more commitment and leadership.

The increase and frequency of natural disasters continue to devastate countless lives. I extend Samoa's deep condolences to a sister SIDS, Haiti, for

the lives lost and the immeasurable devastation wrought by the Earthquake. We fully support the Resolution on assistance to Haiti in the aftermath of the recent disasters.

These environmental threats can only worsen. The latest report on climate change from the IPCC shows that global greenhouse gas emissions must be halved in the next decade, and reach net zero emissions by mid-century, if the promise of 1.5 degree Celsius is to remain within reach.

Efforts to drive down global emissions such as investing in clean and affordable energy; moving towards green resilient economies; tackling deforestation; ending coal power and focusing all efforts to protect nature must take precedence. Such solutions must be complemented by ensuring climate finance for frontline countries, and utilizing the advance scientific knowledge and superior technology available.

Samoa has submitted its Second Nationally Determined Contribution with increased ambition nuanced in specific emissions reduction targets. We reiterate the call on all parties to commit to updated and more ambitious NDCs in order to meet the Paris Agreement promise.

The upcoming COP in Glasgow is our point of no return. Our commitments from there onwards, will determine the future trajectory for our planet. Can we avoid a climate catastrophe in our children's lifetime?

Excellencies,

The ocean surrounds, protects and provides for us 'ocean states'. It is core to our Pacific way of life. Tied explicitly to our need for climate action is our custodianship of the world's oceans. As the Blue Pacific continent, our collective priority is to maintain the health of the ocean as well as the sustainable management of our vast and biodiverse ocean.

A new 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific continent will reinforce the prioritization of ocean and climate change considerations in all policies and plans. A shared ocean, means shared responsibility and benefits, for our environment, economies and communities. Our marine protection goals in our first Ocean Strategy, are aligned to the Blue Leaders 30 x 30-campaign calling for protecting 30% of our global oceans by 2030. We welcome the complementarity of such initiatives.

The Pacific Ocean hosts a remarkable array of biodiversity. With our Blue Pacific family, Samoa continues to prioritize both marine and terrestrial ecosystems' restoration. Despite the challenges, we remain engaged in the Convention on the Biological Diversity COP15 process. Together with the UNFCCC COP26, 2021 is a critical year for aligning action to tackle the climate emergency, and addressing the threat posed by biodiversity loss.

Securing our maritime zones against the threat of climate change-related sea-level rise, and preserving our existing rights and entitlements stemming from maritime zones, is of fundamental importance to our Pacific region. Therefore, the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum at their 51st meeting this year, endorsed the Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the face of Climate-Change Related Sea Level Rise.

All countries must unite to prevent and reduce marine pollution including plastics, oil spills, waste discharge and nuclear contaminants. UN reports claim that every year more than 8 million tonnes of plastics end up in the ocean. If this trend continues, by 2050 our ocean will have 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. Samoa fully supports the Ministerial Conference on Marine and Plastic Pollution aimed at agreeing on a common global approach to confront the scourge of marine plastic.

Samoa fully supports finalizing the work on the legally binding Instrument on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ instrument) in a timely, robust and effective manner.

Excellencies,

The Global food system is at a critical stage made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic and onslaught of climate change. The Food Systems Summit held this week was instrumental in mobilizing global citizens to find transformative solutions. Samoa was pleased to be part of this important event which encouraged shared exploration of potential for collective action.

Through organized dialogues, Samoa benefited from a comprehensive assessment of the issues involved in building the sustainability of our food systems. Extreme hunger is not a concern in Samoa as food availability is not the issue. Access to a balanced and nutritional diet is the main concern and this 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. Unhealthy diets, tobacco and alcohol use, and lack of physical exercise are the main risk factors.

Excellencies,

Samoa has for decades championed the importance of the rule of law and protection of the rights of its peoples. Many labeled the events that unfolded following our 2021 elections a constitutional crisis. While these were difficult times for Samoa, it was also a key part of our journey moving forward as a mature democracy. It divided our country and tested all key pillars of our society – our faith, our culture and the rule of law. However, my delivering this statement as the first female Prime Minister of Samoa and bringing about a change in government after decades, are testament to the fact that the rule of law has prevailed. Samoa today still remains peaceful and COVID free, despite all the challenges we face. The new government will continue to ensure safeguarding the rule of law and upholding of the human rights of its people. Special attention to vulnerable groups and strengthened social protection measures remain a priority.

Samoa will be presenting its third Universal Periodic Review in November 2021. We maintain that our Christian values, unique culture and traditions complement the human rights and fundamental freedoms we commit to promote, respect, protect and fulfill.

Excellencies,

We want a future of peaceful societies, free from conflict, and the threat of terrorism. We condemn all acts of international terrorism and violent extremism

which must be dealt with through international cooperation and in accordance with the UN Charter.

The elimination of all forms of weapons is a step closer to a world of peace. The recent events in Afghanistan highlight the plight of thousands of people fleeing their homes in search of refuge and safety. We urge the global community to lend all possible humanitarian assistance to those in desperate need. Samoa continues to contribute to the peace and security agenda through its police peacekeepers.

We are embracing the many advantages cyberspace offers, and our economy and quality of life are the better for it. However, we also recognize that they also pose as threats in some ways. The increasing use of Information Communications Technology (ICT) has raised issues of security and privacy. The exploitation of computers and telecommunications technology for criminal activities has increased. Incidents of hacking, virus attacks, access and dissemination and misuse of information and network security can no longer be ignored. We look forward to actively engaging in discussions of the Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes.

For a small developing island nation like Samoa, we rely on the collective responsibility as a global community to prevent and combat high-tech cyber and electronic crimes, including social media abuse and online child sexual exploitation. The reality for us is that the criminals are more advanced than our nations in these technologies. Thus we need to work together to combat and eliminate these destabilizing activities.

Excellencies,

Accelerated action to meet the promise of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs is an imperative. COVID19 and climate change have reversed hard fought development gains. However, we must persist in our efforts to meet the SDGs as they provide the best hope in our fight against the pandemic and the threat of the climate crisis.

We need to remind ourselves of the commitments and undertakings we made towards the full implementation of the SAMOA Pathway. I thank all SIDS partners, the Secretary-General and Secretariat 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. It will allow domestic and international resources to be better targeted towards greater accountability and transparency. We urge that outstanding issues relating to the framework be concluded with urgency considering the fast approaching timeline set out in the Secretary-General's report on this matter.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face a unique set of vulnerabilities which impede their ability to achieve sustainable development. Structural factors, including their size, remoteness, and exposure to climate risks and natural disasters impact socio economic outcomes and their ability to achieve the SDGs. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated those vulnerabilities with many SIDS countries being particularly affected by the drop in international tourism and remittances. Consequently, the 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.

Samoa thanks the Resident Coordinators in the SIDS that worked diligently, towards the development of the MVI under the joint leadership of the UN and the Government of Samoa, and in partnership with Professor Jeffrey Sachs and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. We are appreciative of the fact that the MVI is a tool that provides for a richer lens on vulnerability. We look forward to the joint review of the Report of the Secretary-General on the way forward of the MVI and its use.

Excellencies,

Allow me to touch briefly on the system reform of our organization. Samoa unreservedly believes that the UN is uniquely suited to coordinate and advance the cause of our global initiatives. With the structural aspects of the reforms now well consolidated, we should build on the momentum to continue effective implementation.

Samoa looks forward to continuing an active role in the reform process to ensure that we have a UN that is fit for purpose, and highly tuned to meet the challenges of the future. The continued strengthening of the Resident Coordinator system must include ending the fragmented approach at national level. We caution against a heavy regional approach that does not respond to national needs and priorities. We also further call for more clarity around the definition of roles against the inevitable constraints imposed by post-COVID 19, on resource availability in the immediate future. We continue to call for starting text based negotiations for the reform of the Security Council.

Excellencies,

The fact that we continue to meet virtually is testament to the many challenges COVID19 has placed on us. The pandemic has also directed our attention to the many “code red” alarms for humanity. Business as usual is not an option. We must take this opportunity for breakthrough as the UN secretary General puts it.

For Samoa, our borders with the outside world have been closed since the advent of the COVID pandemic in early 2020. We have prioritized the safety and health of our people over economic considerations. Like other countries, it was not an easy decision to take, considering the imminent economic challenges that will follow. Key to our response to COVID19 is the full vaccination of our population. We express our deep appreciation to the COVAX Facility, the UN family, regional organisations and our development partners especially Australia Japan and New Zealand, who were instrumental in Samoa accessing sufficient vaccines to cover the eligible population. Discussions continue with New Zealand to secure relevant vaccines for our population under 17 years. Our vaccination roll out continues. To ensure full population coverage and achieve herd immunity, Government introduced a whole of country lockdown this week, for 2 days, to carry out mass vaccination.

Excellencies,

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. The United Nations must understand our unique

cultures, respect our diversity and embrace our differences to help build the future we want through partnerships

Multilateralism and united international cooperation is our best response to the many threats we face. 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. This can change our world for the better, and leave hope for our future generations. Soifua!