



**Statement
by
Honourable Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi,
Prime Minister
of
the Independent State of Samoa
at the
General Debate,
United Nations General Assembly
Seventieth session
New York, 30 September 2015**

Mr. President,
Heads of Delegations,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen.

Last Friday ushered in a new era in our search for an innovative plan of action for people and the planet. The significant milestone event was the adoption by the United Nations of the new set of Sustainable Development Goals as part of the 2030 global agenda.

Our seventeen Sustainable Development Goals are inspirational and ambitious. They are global in nature and universally applicable to every UN member state, developed and developing. Every goal is important and deserves priority attention. They are interrelated, carry equal weight and they all matter. Achieving some goals at the expense of others is not a preferred option. All goals must be realized which should be the overriding objective.

Mr. President,
I have tried to attend the annual UN general Assembly Debate as often as possible since becoming Samoa's Prime Minister, in my firm belief in the importance of the work of our organization. I am therefore acutely aware of the diversity and gravity of issues confronting our organization and the need sometimes to refer to them in one's statement. However, partly in recognition of the new agenda we have now agreed to implement, and as a gesture to the

70th anniversary of our organization and the imminent danger of Climate Change for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) my statement in essence is devoted to the Sustainable Development Goal Number 13, "**Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts**".

Mr. President,

Climate change will continue to be the major preoccupation and priority policy determinant for Samoa well in to the future. I think that the same would be true for all our Pacific Island countries and the wider SIDS.

Thus to contextualize our perspective on climate change, allow me to share with delegates' part of our narrative.

Firstly, some givens.

- Climate change is the single most urgent challenge confronting mankind.
- It is facilitated largely through human-induced activities driven for the most part by profit motives with some degree of insensitivity to the consequences of such action on others, particularly those vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, usually ill-prepared to adapt, and in most cases had barely contributed to the causes of climate change in the first place.
- Climate change is not a future phenomenon. It is real, irreversible and is already happening with far more frequency. It is no longer a question of when, but rather the severity of the magnitude of the impacts and the full cost society must bear. Even now in my country, we are suffering drought conditions. This will give way to the onset of the cyclone season predicted to have a high likelihood of severe cyclones in our Pacific region.
- As a cross-cutting issue, ambitious actions or solutions at the national and international levels to try to address the root causes of climate change will inevitably end up either being compromised, watered down or put-aside due to political, social and economic considerations taking precedence over basic climate logic.
- Climate change is not a small island developing states concern only. It impacts every country, but some, more extensively like Small Island Developing States, than others because our capacity to respond quickly and effectively is constrained by our realities

- In summary, climate change cannot be wished away. It is real, irreversible and is already happening. It has significant security implications and its impact threatens the continued existence and viability of some small island developing states. Even those countries which have been in self-denial to date of the climate change phenomenon must surely now accept the weight of scientific evidence.

Mr. President,

Samoa is a Small island developing state from the Pacific, a region recognized and acknowledged as most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Our islands contributed the least to the causes of climate change, yet stand to suffer the most and least able to adapt effectively to the adverse impacts. Climate change is a security risk of far greater proportions than many people are prepared to admit. For some of the low lying Pacific island countries, climate change may well lead to their eventual extinction as sovereign states. Just a few months ago I was privileged to attend the special Security Council Open Debate on Security concerns of SIDS. It was an important opportunity to highlight in the Council the security threat of Climate Change for all our Small Island Developing States.

Mr. President,

Against the backdrop of the existential threat climate change poses especially to atolls and low lying islands, SIDS had long been advocating for ambitious mitigation efforts by member states with the capacity to do so, and for a global goal of limiting the rise in average global temperature to **well below 1.5 degrees Celsius** to prevent some of our low-lying islands from being submerged by sea level rise.

We have also consistently called for a Loss and Damage mechanism to be anchored in a new Paris Agreement to be treated separately from "adaptation".

With the gradual operationalisation of the Green Climate Fund, we have asked SIDS representatives on the Green Climate Fund Board to ensure that the spirit and letter of the Governing Instrument of the Fund as they relate to those areas that will be beneficial to SIDS are retained and not compromised.

Our pleas over the years on the 1.5 degrees and the Loss and Damage had largely gone unnoticed. At least the countries our messages had been intended for remain unconvinced, but I hope not disinterested.

Part of this, I think, is due to some misguided notion that the climate phenomena and related events affect Small island developing states only. Some might have concluded already that climate change is not life-threatening and does not affect them either because their countries are huge in sizes or well-developed infrastructure to be shielded from any real damages from climate change impacts.

It may also be that there is an implied sense that if the large problems of the bigger, stronger, more populous and well developed countries are solved, then the solutions to the afflictions of SIDS will automatically follow. As a result, challenges facing SIDS are conveniently viewed by others from the same lens which blurs the distinctions and fails to bring out the truth about the urgency and dire consequences of the problems we face because of Climate Change.

But times are changing.

And the world has witnessed in recent months and years epic outbreak of horrific natural disasters unprecedented in the 70 year history of our organization. Tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, flooding, bush fires, draughts have resulted in countless loss of lives and untold sorrow and sufferings.

Especially noteworthy is the fact that **developed countries are no longer insulated from the reach and destructive force of these events**. Some countries and regions had been visited upon by climate-related and natural events like cyclones, bushfires, flooding, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, droughts etc.

Mr. President,

What is happening across our planet is quite significant because it discredits the long-held perception by some that climate change is a small island developing states concern only.

Nothing can be further from the truth. Events of the recent past have demonstrated that climate related disasters do not discriminate between poor and rich countries, big or small. Climate change affects us all, developed and developing countries though in varying degrees.

I submit therefore that this realization should shape our overall approach going forward to the Paris climate conference in December and beyond. Hopefully, it should also help to shift the focus in the relationship in the specific context of climate change from that of **"donor/recipient"** or **"donor/victim"** to one of **"partner/partner"** in a joint partnership. While this may sound overly simplified, its real value lies in the change of perspective this re-

orientation should bring and in how we view our respective roles when trying to address climate change. This, I think, should be beneficial to all.

Because we are now all affected by climate change in one way or another, that should energize everyone to do their utmost either as current or future victims of climate change impacts to ensure that we address the root causes urgently and in a decisive manner.

After all, human nature tells us that when we are asked to do something for a friend or someone else, the impact is not the same because there is no sense of obligation, commitment or urgency. But when we have to do something because it will affect us personally, our children or family, nothing will stop or prevent us from doing all that is possible within our power especially if it affects our own safety and future.

Hopefully member states, imbued not just with the projections of science, but now with the advanced evidence of actual events will be prepared to go the extra mile to do the maximum possible for their own future survival.

Mr. President,

Climate change is a societal problem requiring a decisive response from the global community. It is a challenge that should unite us, not divide us. No country can deal with this problem alone. We must work cooperatively in a partnership of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capability, if we are to succeed. But true partnerships should be underpinned by trust. Without trust, they cannot be sustained. Apportioning blame for past wrongs will be counterproductive. They will not restore our environment to its pre-industrial state.

Mr. President,

Clearly, we want leaders who view the world as a single constituency where everyone must work together within the limits of their capacity and capability to be part of the total solution.

Sadly, some amongst our global community had been dismissive and remain unconvinced. Others through their actions had been indifferent and unsympathetic.

But there is hope.

And our whole focus is on Paris.

What is needed is principled action. The Paris Agreement requires a new brand of cooperation and broad outlook. The narrow pursuit of self-interests, the use of economic and political expediencies should be set aside and must not be allowed to de-rail the goal of concluding a universal, ambitious and legally binding agreement.

Climate change is also everyone's job. While acknowledging "historical responsibility" is legitimate, allowing it to get in the way of making decisions to reach a comprehensive agreement would be a grave mistake.

A durable Climate change agreement in Paris is therefore a test of multilateral solidarity. Time is running out. The impacts of climate change are getting worse daily. Playing the "blame and shame" tactics, or "waiting to be led but not willing to lead", are no longer options. For no single nation, no single group of nations, and no single organization on its own can win the war against climate change. The divergent, yet inextricably linked interests of member states demands that we "seal a good deal" in Paris.

The Paris agreement should focus on bold national action and the inclusion of all stakeholders - a timely reminder that no action is too small or insignificant. All contributions matter and every action counts irrespective of the source. Importantly, it places the responsibility of addressing climate change squarely on every individual leader in terms of what national actions he or she can commit to deliver as his country's contribution to our collective task. Samoa is putting the final touches to its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions which are quite ambitious and will be submitted in due course to the Secretariat in Bonn.

Mr. President,

Often at times we blame others for our misfortunes and the current status of our development, including telling others what they should do, by when and how, but rarely on what we can contribute to make a change.

So when my country and our people are exposed to the impacts of climate change continuously, we want to be part of the solution by committing to do everything possible for the benefit of our people, our generation and those to follow. That must be our universal message, simple and unambiguous.

As for those suggesting they are implementing bold actions for the sake of our vulnerable Small Island Developing states, they should instead be reminded to take time to inform their constituencies and supporters alike, especially those that deny climate change, that in the final

analysis, the actions being recommended and if implemented, will ultimately benefit their economies, their own people and the survival of their countries.

Mr. President,

The United Nations remains our last best hope to provide the political will and the necessary commitment to turn the tide against climate change.

Samoa calls upon those member states of our organization in position of world leadership to lead the charge in finding and implementing solutions to the causes of climate change. As present custodians of our world's environment, we owe it to our children and future generations to do what needs to be done quickly, and decisively, before we run out of time. It is therefore imperative to complete the Paris climate agreement in time for the Conference of Parties in December to adopt an agreement that is ambitious, universally applicable, effective, binding, capable of swift implementation and universally owned and respected by all member states.

In the same way that nations in leadership roles are called to account in doing the right thing for our world, so must all the member states of the UN uphold their part of the bargain in the work that needs to be done. Without this cooperation from all member states, reaching the objectives we all know should be achieved, would continue to elude us.

Mr. President,

International terrorism is a global menace. It creates an atmosphere of collective fear and intolerance. It preys on the innocent, vulnerable and defenseless, and disrupts any progress to peace and development. Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations should always be condemned unreservedly.

Over the last several weeks, we have witnessed the tragedy of people fleeing from their countries mired in the destruction from war and terrorism. Obviously, a credible and long-term response is needed to this grave crisis that has cost so many lives and affecting so many people. Individual actions by States cannot in themselves provide a solution. We must shoulder our responsibility to act together to meet the threat through concerted multilateral action which underpins the spirit of the organization. Ideally, it must start in the Security Council entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining world peace.

The coherence of the response from our United Nations depends on the work and cooperative spirit of the Security Council to see the great picture of the future of our world. The reforms to our organization must therefore be given priority and to take account of the concerns of our full membership.

Our world has enjoyed peace and security for 70 years by faithfully observing and following the Charter of our organization. As world leaders, it is our moral duty and responsibility to ensure that our people continue to live in peace and harmony for many more years to come.

I thank you.

Faafetai ma ia Soifua.