



**Statement
by
Honourable Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi,
Prime Minister
of the
Independent State of Samoa
at the
General Debate,
United Nations General Assembly
Seventy-first session
New York, 23 September 2016**

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

The 71st session of the General Assembly holds special significance for Samoa and the Pacific region.

At the helm of the General Assembly for the first time ever, is a Pacific Islander and diplomat from Fiji, His Excellency Ambassador Peter Thomson. The Pacific is often considered a region of peace and tranquility, but such credit belies the diverse and enormous challenges we face daily, as a group, and as island states. The focus therefore of your presidency on the collective "implementation" of all the Sustainable Development Goals, is a timely and fitting catalyst to help transform our region's numerous challenges into real and lasting opportunities. Samoa congratulates you on your election as President of the General Assembly and lends its full support to the agenda that will guide our work during your tenure.

Mr. President,
This general debate is the Secretary-General's final one, before he steps down after a decade-long service to the cause of humanity.

From Samoa's perspective, Ban ki-moon has been, and continues to be a true champion and persistent advocate of issues that are of immense significance to Small Island Developing States. His passionate leadership on climate change, the undisputed priority concern of every Pacific island country and territory, endeared him to the Pacific region. Equally memorable is the rare distinction he holds as the only Secretary-General in the seventy-one year history of the United Nations, who has ever visited the Pacific region "twice" during his term of office. That is no mean feat given the constraints of isolation and travel.

In September 2011, the Secretary-General attended the Summit meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum leaders in New Zealand, visiting Solomon Islands and Kiribati along the way. There, he witnessed first-hand both the scars and excessive damage to the physical landscape and coastlines caused by climate change, as well as the resilience and sheer determination of Pacific peoples in the frontlines of climate change, to ensure survival and continued existence of some of the islands as sovereign nations.

Later in 2014, Samoa's isolation and lack of political clout in the global arena were bridged when Ban ki-moon including the whole UN Chief Executive Board visited to attend the UN Conference on Small Island Developing States hosted by Samoa on behalf of the Pacific region. On his arrival Ban ki-moon was welcomed as "**His Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations**". A few days later on his departure, he was fondly farewelled as "**Afioga Tupua Ban ki-moon**", after he was conferred the chiefly title of "Tupua". Such events are now a memorable part of our history.

The close rapport between the Secretary-General and our region was further evidenced this morning when Pacific leaders met with him as part of our yearly meetings in New York, a much anticipated event which has become an annual feature of our September calendar

Might I add, Mr. Secretary-General and Samoan chief, as the chapter in your life of service to multilateralism draws to a close, we thank you for your principled leadership and robust advocacy for issues that affect and impact our islands and peoples personally and directly. We wish you well in your future calling and trust that your successor will embrace and continue your legacy, especially in the context of climate change and the much anticipated Paris Agreement on the verge of entering into force any time now.

Mr. President,

Last year, we agreed on a number of global agendas, outcomes and agreements. They represent our hopes for solutions to address the issues before our Assembly ranging from sustainable development to climate change, from disaster risk resilience to development financing and from humanitarian challenges to peace and security. Collectively, they represent the totality of our needs and priorities including the means to achieve them. Every issue is important and all are interconnected. None should be considered as subservient to be marginalized, abandoned or sidelined. They deserve to be implemented in an all-inclusive approach to ensure that they will be addressed and treated equally. Only then can one say with some level of comfort, that in the implementation of our new sustainable agenda, *"no one will be left behind"*.

That is the backdrop and the reality against which the world is anxiously awaiting who will be your successor to navigate the UN during the critical "implementation phase" of our inspirational goals. This is a mammoth task, but not an impossible one.

The search for a new Secretary-General is gaining momentum and an appointment appears imminent. Yet in this "all important" process, Samoa, like others is largely a bystander and an observer, not by choice, but by design. And like the majority of member states, Samoa hopes that the current practice will be reformed soon to give the wider membership an active role in selecting who the Head of their Organization should be. And we can only hope for the institutionalization of best practice.

Samoa expects the new Secretary-General to be independent and not beholden to the priorities and influence of those who will sanction the appointment. The Secretary-General should treat each and every UN member state equally, and accord the same level of attention and priority to their issues and concerns alike, irrespective of their size, political influence or economic might.

We look forward to welcoming and working closely with the new Appointee. We are confident that new leadership will usher in a spring of hope that will provide a tailored and fit-for-purpose Secretariat for the challenging task at hand. Only in true partnership can member states and the Secretariat work concertedly to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 agenda.

Mr. President,

We are greatly encouraged by the demonstrable commitment and political will to transform the Paris Agreement to reality and that it is poised to enter into force soon.

This is a welcomed and positive development especially from the perspective of all island nations, given the extent and impacts of climate change already felt. And when cyclones and natural disasters are happening more frequently and with greater intensity in our part of the world, as witnessed recently in Vanuatu and Fiji, the early entry into force of the Paris Agreement remains everyone's top priority - because as vulnerable small island developing states, we cannot afford to lose the hard earned gains of many years. We applaud the leadership shown by member states that have ratified, or had pledged to do so soon, so that the Paris Agreement can enter into force in record time.

The science of climate change is clear and unequivocal. The political will to accelerate the early operationalization of the Paris agreement is now evident. But signing and ratifying the climate agreement are the easy and early achievables. Delivering on promises and making good on commitments and undertakings pledged are the seal of true leadership. We need to match the political will with the provision of adequate resources that are easily accessible so that the climate pledges submitted already to the United Nations can facilitate early implementation of all efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions without delay.

The coordinated management and utilization of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the Adaptation Fund (AF) and the newly established Green Climate Fund (GCF), and complementarities offered by other funding sources both private and public, will become all the more critical in the implementation phase. The challenge is out to the Green Climate Fund and other funding institutions to assist Small island developing states access their resources through a streamlined and simplified project cycle and approval process.

Mr. President,

Addressing climate change is everyone's responsibility, not a monopoly reserved for governments only.

Last year, we boldly declared a shared commitment to stronger global efforts to ensure all people have a right to live in dignity, free from want and fear. The Sustainable development goals were not just visionary goals or mere aspirations. They are basic human needs achievable within our lifetime. And our optimism was rooted in a culture of shared responsibility and in the belief in humanity. Achieving the SDGs will not be easy without the support of our development partners. Sustainable development requires sustained effort and commitment. Partnerships with the donor community require mutual trust and understanding.

The 2030 agenda integrating the 3 pillars of sustainable development is not just a preferable option, but the only option. Samoa volunteered to report on its implementation of the new global agenda during this year's High Level Political Forum (HLPF) less than a year after the agenda was adopted. In offering to share its experience with the wider UN membership, Samoa was equally keen to benefit and learn from the experiences of the other 21 states that were reviewed.

The **SAMOA Pathway** is an integral part of our wider 2030 agenda. It represents a dedicated roadmap for SIDS transitioning from the MDGs to the SDGs and for the eventual achievement of the 17 new goals. Our new agenda highlights partnerships as an important part of Sustainable Development Goal 17 – the “Means of Implementation”. With the SIDS Partnership Framework already launched, it is important that all SIDS, the development partners and UN organizations are actively and constructively engaged and that the platform continues to be supported, monitored and reported on regularly.

Different partnerships modalities will be forged from time to time depending on SIDS priorities. They can be the traditional North-South, the emerging South-South, the well-tested triangular cooperation or even the novel SIDS-SIDS partnerships. Importantly, every partnership matters. And when you belong to the UN group with special challenges and vulnerabilities in the context of sustainable development, all options should be open for consideration.

The SIDS Partnerships Framework and the Steering Committee is the platform out of which new partnerships will emerge through its outreach initiatives and coordination to ensure that all partners involved work together cooperatively and in a cohesive manner for the attainment of SIDS development needs.

Mr. President,

Oceans and seas have a fundamental role in contributing to global prosperity, from regulating climate to providing food security for billions of people and are an important source of employment and income for many communities globally. The sustainable management of oceans and seas is therefore critical for economic and social development, poverty eradication and in raising living standards worldwide.

Yet the health of the oceans is increasingly compromised by pressures, including overfishing, climate change, ocean acidification, habitat loss and pollution. As the health of the marine ecosystems declines, so too, does its capacity to provide food, livelihoods and incomes. These impacts disproportionately affect our island countries, the most

vulnerable and least able to adapt. And if these trends continue, critical thresholds may soon be reached, with potentially dire consequences for our islands' food security, incomes and livelihoods.

It was against the backdrop of mounting challenges and a sense of pessimism given the fragmentation of UN discussions on ocean issues, that Pacific SIDS championed the need for "oceans" to be a stand-alone goal in the new set of Sustainable Development Goals. SDG 14 is now the dedicated goal on oceans.

Last week's 3rd conference on "Our Oceans, Our Future" hosted by the US Government under the leadership of Secretary of State John Kerry and the UN Oceans Conference in June 2017 are welcomed efforts at the global level to address some of these emerging concerns.

The start of the preparatory process to develop an international legally binding instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction is a positive development in the right direction and one that the Pacific islands are participating in very actively.

Mr. President,

The world is a powerless witness to the tragedy of people fleeing from their countries mired in the destruction of war and terrorism. Obviously, a credible and long-term response is needed to address this grave crisis that has cost so many innocent lives and affected so many people. Individual actions by States cannot in themselves provide a solution. We must all shoulder the responsibility to collectively 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.

Imagine how easily achievable some, if not all the 17 SDGs would be if all the resources spent on the futility of wars were instead diverted for much needed economic and social activities so necessary for the creation of a peaceful society. Our world has enjoyed peace and security for 70 years by faithfully observing and following the Charter of our organization. World leaders with the power and authority to end wars have the moral duty and responsibility to ensure that our people continue to live in peace and harmony for many more years to come.

Mr. President,

The leaders in their reflective wisdom reaffirmed their faith in a strengthened and

reformed United Nations as a vital multilateral institution to respond effectively and ably to the challenges of the 21st century and to deliver on the millennium declaration.

Samoa supports an enlarged Security Council in both membership categories to reflect contemporary geo-political realities. The case for democratic and transparency in the Council's procedures and working methods to facilitate a more engaged and effective relationship with the General Assembly remains a compelling one. The Assembly on the other hand must work hard to re-gain the confidence of the world in its status as the highest deliberative and representative decision making body of the organization.

Let me now pay homage to the selfless work performed by the men and women in the blue helmets serving in various peacekeeping operations, some of who had paid the ultimate sacrifice. Samoa will continue to provide civilian policemen and women as its tangible contribution to this noble cause.

In closing, let us be reminded that the strength of our organization lies in our numbers and our diverse membership. We must rise above the dictates of narrow national interests and work to benefit from the diverse richness of our membership.

Let us capitalize on our "unity in diversity" and set aside our differences to work as nations united for the common good of mankind.

Thank you.