



National Statement

PRIME MINISTER OF TUVALU

Honourable Mr. Kausea Natano

at

The 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

General Debate

September 22, 2023

New York

UNGA78 Theme:

“Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity: Accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals towards peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability for all”

Mr. President

Distinguished Members of the General Assembly

Ladies and gentlemen

Introduction

1. I extend commendations to the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Denis Francis, Ambassador of Trinidad and Tobago, who takes on the helm of this distinguished body in this 78th Session. Tuvalu has its full confidence and trust in your leadership to steer our canoe through the rough seas ahead of us. At this juncture, I acknowledge the outgoing President, His Excellency Csaba Korosi, for his stellar presidency, dedication, and service to this esteemed body throughout the 77th Session.

Mr President

2. In less than two weeks, my island nation of Tuvalu will be celebrating a momentous occasion - its 45th Anniversary of Independence. This event holds great significance in the history of our nation, symbolizing our journey through self-governance and sovereignty. It is with a deep sense of gratitude that I express my people's heartfelt appreciation to the United Nations and its member states for their unwavering support in recognizing Tuvalu as an independent state. This recognition was further solidified 23 years ago when Tuvalu officially became a member of this esteemed organization in September 2000.
3. Tuvalu's membership in the United Nations serves as more than just a symbolic gesture. It represents a beacon of hope for our country, assuring us of the international community's commitment to safeguarding our sovereignty, even in the face of multifaceted challenges and existential threats. The United Nations, with its noble values centered around peace, security, and prosperity, radiates hope and assurance to small and vulnerable nations like Tuvalu. Being a member of this esteemed organization gives us confidence in our ability to navigate these uncertain times and reinforces our belief that we are not alone in our pursuit of a prosperous and secure future.

Mr President

4. I would like to take a moment to express Tuvalu's heartfelt condolences, to all those who have been affected by the recent natural disasters. Our hearts go out to the victims of the earthquake in Morocco and the flash flooding in Libya this month, as well as the wildfire in Hawaii in August this year. We also extend our sympathy to those who have suffered as a result of conflicts in Africa and the war in Ukraine.

Mr. President

Theme:

“Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity: Accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals towards peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability for all”

5. Turning now to the theme, Tuvalu wholeheartedly embraces this powerful narrative put forth by the 78th President of the General Assembly, as it aligns perfectly with our goal of creating a sustainable future for our nation and the world at large. It is imperative that we demonstrate unwavering commitment to the principles set forth in the UN Charter and prioritize the well-being of our planet and all its inhabitants.
6. To fulfill this theme, we must first focus on rebuilding trust among nations and international institutions. The erosion of trust has impeded global cooperation and stymied progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We must work towards repairing relationships, promoting transparent and accountable governance, and fostering an environment of collaboration and mutual respect. By doing so, we can restore faith in international institutions and cultivate partnerships that will enable us to effectively address the challenges of our time.
7. Similarly, reigniting global solidarity requires us to prioritize peacebuilding efforts. Peace is a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development, as conflicts and instability hinder progress towards the SDGs. We must invest in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction to ensure that communities can thrive and effectively work towards achieving the goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda.

8. And To Accelerate Action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, it requires collective effort and collaboration on a global scale. We must recognize that we are all interconnected, and the prosperity and well-being of one nation, ultimately impacts the entire planet. Tuvalu therefore welcomes the theme because it entails rebuilding trust, promoting global solidarity, prioritizing peacebuilding, fostering prosperity, and advancing sustainability, which can make significant strides towards a more equitable, peaceful, and sustainable future for all.

Mr President

High-Level Week Events

SDG Summit

9. Let me now make some reflections on the important events of the High-Level Week that took place concurrently to the General Debate this week.
10. Tuvalu applauds the two-day SDG Summit which served as an important platform for member states to collectively assess the progress made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It provides an opportunity to recognize and address the specific challenges faced by each country in their pursuit of these goals.
11. Tuvalu, as a small island developing state, faces unique and pressing issues in meeting the targets set forth in the SDGs. Fundamentally, the threat of climate change and rising sea levels poses the greatest challenge to the sustainable development we strive to achieve for our people. As a low-lying island State, Tuvalu is particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, such as extreme weather events, which affects our ability to achieve our SDG targets.
12. *One example is SDG 6, which highlights the significance of clean water and sanitation. The more frequent occurrence of droughts has further exacerbated the scarcity of our already limited freshwater harvested from rainwater. Furthermore, the infiltration of seawater into our water lenses has progressively heightened the levels of salinity. Consequently, this has adverse effects on the productivity of vegetation, resulting in reduced agricultural yields and even loss of plant life.*

- 13. Another key concern for Tuvalu is the need for sustainable economic growth and development. My country depends on limited resources and is heavily reliant on fisheries license and remittance revenue generation. Hence, achieving SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) is crucial for Tuvalu's long-term development. This requires the establishment of sustainable practices in various sectors, such as fisheries and agriculture, while ensuring the preservation of our unique culture and environment.*
- 14. Additionally, the SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land) are of utmost importance to Tuvalu. As a nation surrounded by the Pacific Ocean, marine conservation and the preservation of coral reefs are crucial for the biodiversity and the livelihoods of the local communities. The sustainable use of marine resources and the protection of terrestrial ecosystems are essential aspects that Tuvalu needs to address to achieve these goals.*
15. In light of these challenges, Tuvalu remains fully committed to the SDGs and acknowledges the importance of forging strong partnerships, particularly through SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). Collaborative efforts with other member states, international organizations, and stakeholders are vital in mobilizing support and resources to address Tuvalu's unique contextual challenges and achieve the shared objectives of sustainable development. By focusing on these central issues and utilizing the SDGs as a guiding framework, Tuvalu aims to build a resilient future while preserving its culture, environment, and ensuring the well-being of its people.

Mr President

SG Climate Ambition Summit 2023:

16. We commend the Secretary-General for convening the Climate Ambition Summit, a pivotal moment for global climate action. **We need not call for Sympathy, rather we call for Solutions!** In hindsight, climate justice should be at the forefront of our efforts as we address the urgent need for mitigation, adaptation, and support for the most vulnerable nations.

17. We embrace the efforts and collective support for the UN resolution championed by Vanuatu for an Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to reinforce the responsibility of states under international law to safeguard the climate system. It is the hope of Tuvalu that International Law will provide the moral punch to phase out fossil fuels and confront polluters to become responsible.
18. Furthermore, I would like to mention at this juncture that just last week, the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda and I, had the privilege of appearing before the esteemed judges of the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in Hamburg, Germany. Our purpose was to present our arguments and submissions regarding an Advisory Opinion, similar to that of Vanuatu, but relating to the obligations of State Parties under Part XII of the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), specifically in terms of protecting and preserving the marine environment in relation to climate change impacts, including ocean warming and sea level rise, and ocean acidification.
- 19. The ITLOS proceedings are of utmost importance in the ICJ case concerning Vanuatu's advisory opinion. They lay the groundwork by clarifying and elucidating the legal principles and interpreting relevant provisions of international law. Additionally, these proceedings can influence the outcome of the ICJ case by providing a factual and legal basis for Vanuatu's claims. Thus, understanding and closely following the ITLOS proceedings are crucial to comprehending the broader context and potential implications for the final ICJ decision concerning Vanuatu's advisory opinion.*
20. Tuvalu urges all UN members to support Vanuatu and us, Antigua & Barbuda and Tuvalu, by submitting their endorsements for the Advisory Opinions' objectives. It is crucial for us to come together in pursuit of climate justice, as the urgency of the matter cannot be overstated. We eagerly anticipate swift action from these judicial branches of this esteemed organization because **'justice delayed, is justice denied'**.

Mr President

Summit for the Future:

21. We applaud the Secretary-General for organizing the Summit for the Future, as it highlights the immense importance of ensuring a prosperous future for everyone. The world is witnessing a rapid and transformative shift towards a digital era, and we believe that embracing this digital transformation is crucial for the progress of both the global community, particularly small island developing states like Tuvalu. The vision of digital transformation under our “Future Now Project” advocates the idea of creating a digital nation, that maps and preserves Tuvalu’s identity and values for us and our generations to come. This digital revolution ensures that no one is left behind, as it empowers individuals and communities with knowledge, connectivity, and access to essential services.
22. For Tuvalu, the adoption of a ‘digital nation’ approach can have a profound impact on addressing resource and geographical challenges. It will enable Tuvaluans to access education, healthcare, and economic opportunities that were previously out of reach. By embracing digital technologies, Tuvalu will equip itself with the tools to implement innovative solutions that address climate and environmental concerns. Overall, the concept of a digital nation and the digital transformation it entails are pivotal to harness progress, inclusivity, and sustainability of Tuvalu and the world over.
23. Despite our vision of a digital nation, it is crucial to acknowledge that our ultimate future as a recognized sovereign state depends on our ability to strengthen our resilience. In pursuing this goal, Tuvalu has developed a comprehensive long-term adaptation plan, known as the L-TAP. Serving as our flagship survival adaptation project, the L-TAP aims to address the imminent threat of rising sea levels by reclaiming and elevating our land territory. This ambitious endeavor is crucial in ensuring that Tuvalu can provide a sustainable habitat for our population well into the next century and beyond. By prioritizing the L-TAP, Tuvalu is taking proactive steps to secure our nation's survival and create a resilient future for our people.

Mr President

SIDS4:

24. Tuvalu acknowledges the significant role of small island developing states (SIDS) within the United Nations system. Being a small island developing State, Tuvalu comprehends the unique obstacles and vulnerabilities that SIDS encounter including climate change, limited economic resources, and geographic isolation. Consequently, Tuvalu commends the regional preparatory meetings and the inter-regional preparatory meeting that took place last month for providing a platform where SIDS can unite and advocate for their distinct needs.
25. The upcoming SIDS4 conference in Antigua and Barbuda next year, presents a valuable opportunity for SIDS to exchange best practices, address shared challenges, and explore action-oriented solutions in furtherance of the SAMOA Pathway. It is imperative that the international community acknowledges and supports the specific needs and aspirations of SIDS, including their endeavors towards achieving sustainable development and building climate resilience.
- 26. Tuvalu recognizes the significance of solidarity and cooperation among this group. By collaborating, SIDS can share their experiences and expertise, leverage resources, and amplify their voices on the global stage. Therefore, we urge SIDS development partners to demonstrate genuine partnership in implementing the SIDS plan for the next ten years.*

Mr President!

Tuvalu Initiatives & Aspirations:

27. At this juncture, allow me to highlight our specific aspirations and initiatives. As a country whose physical existence, lives and livelihoods are at stake, Tuvalu cannot afford to take the back seat and spectate while others maneuver their own interest in our multilateral process to address climate change, particularly sea-level rise. On the heels of the successful Rising National Initiative (RNI) that we launched this time last year, we propose to establish a Coalition on Sea-Level Rise and Existential Threat (C-SET) Initiative. This initiative aims to bring together like-minded states and stakeholders to collectively address the pressing issues

of protecting statehood, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and livelihoods in the face of rising sea levels.

28. Tuvalu believes that the Coalition has a unique role in highlighting and addressing the impact of climate change and sea-level rise on vulnerable nations. The aim is to attract greater attention and action from the international community by amplifying the voices of small island developing states (SIDS) and other nations facing similar challenges. Tuvalu expresses gratitude to countries and stakeholders, in particular Germany, who have already shown interest in joining this important endeavor.
29. In addition to the C-SET Initiative, Tuvalu calls for stronger global action on phasing out fossil fuel production and consumption. At the Climate Ambition Summit on Wednesday this week, Tuvalu made a call for countries to join us, alongside Vanuatu and other Pacific nations, to negotiate a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, a new instrument that would reduce reliance on fossil fuels, promote sustainable development through accelerating the just transition to renewable energy sources, and curb greenhouse gas emissions.
30. At the Glasgow COP26 in 2021, Tuvalu and Antigua & Barbuda took the initiative to establish an inter-governmental organization known as the Commission of Small Island States for Climate Change and International Law (COSIS). COSIS's main objective is to seek justice through the international legal system for the significant negative impact of climate change and sea level rise on our countries and the global community. This proactive step has already yielded positive results, as COSIS is now recognized as a leading institution of the quest for an Advisory Opinion from the ITLOS, I mentioned earlier. The strong support and interest shown by over 30 states and non-state actors, who have made submissions in these proceedings since our appearance before the ITLOS last week, highlights the importance and need for clarity that this Advisory Opinion can bring. We thank these like-minded stakeholders and wish to extend a warm invitation to other UN members to join COSIS in our collective pursuit of climate justice.
31. *Furthermore, Tuvalu reiterates its call in 2016 for a UN Resolution to establish a legal framework for aiding and protecting those displaced by climate change-induced events. We firmly believe that it is essential to bring attention to the urgent need for a proactive and*

coordinated international response to climate-induced displacement. Nonetheless, it must be noted that this call does not in any way indicate that Tuvalu intends to relocate or move out of the place we call home. It is indeed far from it.

Mr President

Reaffirming support of the following Conventions:

32. Tuvalu, as an island state surrounded by the ocean, is fully committed to the signing and effective implementation of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement. Our unison with others to sign the BBNJ Agreement this week is testament to our genuine commitment to the values and purpose of this international legal instrument. Given our heavy reliance on fisheries and marine resources, through signing this Agreement Tuvalu pays tribute to the importance of preserving the health and diversity of the ocean ecosystems for both its own sustainability and the well-being of the global community.
33. Furthermore, Tuvalu takes a firm stance on advocating for the universal participation in the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). The threat of nuclear weapons poses grave risks to humanity and the environment, and Tuvalu recognizes the urgency in eliminating this threat. By urging UN members who have not yet joined the treaty to do so promptly, Tuvalu aims to contribute to a world that is free from the specter of nuclear weapons, where peace and security can thrive for all nations.

Mr President

Calls for support of and condemnations:

34. The Preamble of the UN Charter begins with – “We the people...” – is a powerful statement by this august body to underscore human dignity and human rights as equal people – men and women, boys and girls – of all races and colours. It entails inclusivity, non-discrimination, and oneness of humankind that the United Nations must uphold. Sadly, many people and communities have not been given the same treatment. Tuvalu therefore calls for this esteemed body to ensure the participation of everyone worldwide, including the people of Taiwan. We

must make the necessary arrangements for Taiwan to meaningfully participate in relevant UN specialized agencies and mechanism. Taiwan must be allowed to participate in key UN organizations because Taiwan is widely known for being an able, trustworthy, and willing partner, greatly contributing to collective efforts that address pressing global issues under the purview of these UN agencies.

35. Moreover, Tuvalu is gravely concerned by the continuing and increasing military exercises in the waters and airspace around Taiwan, which not only undermine the status quo across the Taiwan Strait, escalate tension, and impact international transportation and trade, but also jeopardize peace and security in the Pacific Region and of course around the world. We applaud Taiwan for remaining calm and upholding the principles of peace of the UN Charter, and we urge UN member states to defend and uphold the values of the UN.

36. It is unfortunate that the people of Cuba still endure the economic hardships imposed by long-standing unilateral economic blockades. These blockades not only disregard human rights but also go against the principles of cooperation emphasized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The decision to maintain these measures has deprived Cuba of much-needed international development assistance and partnerships crucial for its recovery and future development.

37. Tuvalu is deeply concerned about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as this action undermines the admirable principles outlined in the UN charter for peace and security. The ripple effects of the Ukraine war have reached all the way to the Pacific region and, specifically, to my country of Tuvalu. The resulting increase in fuel costs and unprecedented inflation levels have had grave impacts on our economy and our people.

Mr. President

38. For Tuvalu, Peace is not merely the absence of conflict, it is the presence of justice, equality, and opportunity. It is giving hope to our people through securing a prosperous future. And prosperity, for us Tuvalu, is not just economic growth, it is the ability to protect the wellbeing of our people and our planet through social and environmental sustainability.

39. To achieve these noble goals, Tuvalu is unyielding its commitment to dialogue that entails representations and coalitions. We look at partnerships through this august body for international cooperation that can establish tangible outcomes for the most vulnerable. By pooling our resources, sharing knowledge, and standing in solidarity, we can overcome obstacles and accelerate meaningful progress.

Mr President

Conclusion

40. I would like to conclude by presenting a compelling challenge to this esteemed organization.

It is not enough for us to simply acknowledge our unique role; we must also actively demonstrate our commitment to defending and promoting the core values and principles enshrined in the UN Charter. It is of utmost importance that we remain unwavering in our dedication to collective action and inclusivity, embodying the Tuvalu cultural principles of *kaitasi* and *falepili* - the concepts of caring, sharing, being good neighbors, and leaving no one behind - all for the sake of the sustainable and secure future we envision to have for our young generation and their children.

41. By embodying these noble concepts in our actions, we have the potential to create a brighter and more promising future for humanity and our planet. Let us always bear in mind that, the choices we make, and the actions we take, today, will echo through countless generations to come.

42. Time is of the essence! The clock is ticking! The sun is setting! It is Now or Never!

Tuvalu mo te Atua.

I thank you Mr President.