

OPENING ADDRESS
SECOND PACIFIC CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE
TE HERENGA WAKA—VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Honourable Tuilaepa Dr Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of Samoa

Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be invited to provide the opening address for this Conference under the auspices of Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). I note that the focus is on issues related to climate change and the Pacific Ocean, as they affect our region. And so, I will share the Government of Samoa's responses, in line with our commitment to the Paris Agreement to mitigate and adapt to climate change, particularly through the increased use of renewable energy and reduction in our dependence on fossil fuels; as well as the Call for Action on Oceans through voluntary commitments and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for both SDG13 and SDG14, under Agenda 2030.

Climate change is a reality that we in the Pacific Island Countries are facing every day. It is certainly a global reality even for developed countries such as New Zealand, with increasing incidents of extreme weather events in 2017, and the flash flooding in Auckland in January 2018. In February 2018, Tropical Cyclone Gita in the course of three days, wreaked havoc on four countries in the region, bringing with it record rainfall and unprecedented flooding. Fortunately, there was minimal loss of life. Notable was the rapid speed with which it passed through Samoa initially as a Category 2 cyclone, though still leaving a significant trail of damage through flooding as well as massive landslides never seen before. Cyclone Gita was not as kind to our neighbours, Tonga and the southern group of the Fiji islands, as it gained strength in its circuitous path. With the climatic changes we are experiencing, it is not surprising to find Cyclone Gita over New Zealand, unexhausted.

For Pacific Island Countries, climate change is an existential threat. Low-lying atolls are only a couple of metres above sea level. Predictions from the scientific community put these under water by the end of 2100, if ambitious efforts at emission reductions are not made and innovative solutions to adapt to sea level rise are not realised. The displacement of people will be a norm aggravated by more severe natural disasters. The reality of climate change and increased severity of disasters mean many communities are at risk of losing traditional homelands as tides wash away the shoreline; sea levels continue to rise; and inland communities experience landslides, leaving communities devoid of safer and more disaster resilient land. Added to that, are the challenges of relocation.

Pacific Island Countries need emission reduction targets consistent with "1.5 degree Celsius" of global warming to safeguard our people's well-being and livelihood. Unfortunately, our countries are already experiencing more intense and frequent disasters, higher storm surges, changes in rainfall and weather patterns, the prospect of ocean acidification, all of which will impact on food and water security and our people's livelihoods and well-being. There is a prospect for a region where less land

and diminishing opportunities will create unsustainable economies and create uncertainty and hardship for thousands and thousands of its communities.

The situation includes higher island countries like Samoa, where we would face challenges given that almost our entire infrastructure is located on the coastline, as well as most of our population. Therefore, timely and simplified access to international climate change and disaster risk finance is a priority if we are to adapt to, and mitigate, climate change.

In 2015, the Pacific Island Countries, being the frontline states in the fight against climate change, were instrumental in concluding one of the toughest ever global negotiations for the Paris Agreement. Collectively, the Pacific Leaders and their delegations doggedly pursued our region's priorities until we were able to make the world see climate change through our eyes, as the most vulnerable communities to climate change impacts.

Entry into force of the Paris Agreement in November 2016 set the world on an ambitious and critical path towards resilient and low carbon development. Climate action contributes directly to SDG13 and addresses other SDGs such as SDG14. For small island developing states, the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway 2014 represents an integrated approach to meeting commitments to the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

Reflecting the region's commitment to the Paris Agreement, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in 2016 endorsed the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific. It is a global first where the Pacific region seeks to prevent and reduce its exposure to risk from climate change and natural hazards risk; achieve low carbon development; and improve disaster preparedness, response, recovery and reconstruction.

In June 2017, the Pacific Leaders again rallied to support and influence the outcomes of the inaugural United Nations Oceans Conference, which was co-chaired by Fiji and Sweden. Similarly, Leaders also committed their support to Fiji's Presidency of the 23rd Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP23), held in November 2017 in Bonn, Germany. A key focus was on the close links between Ocean and Climate and the need for oceans to become an integral part of the continuing climate change agenda. Pacific Leaders thence launched the Oceans Pathway at COP23 that seeks to address and strengthen actions related to the ocean-climate nexus.

The World's oceans definitely play a key role in regulating the climate and they buffer among many things the damaging effects of climate change. Ocean research should, therefore, be at the heart of the global response to climate change. There are also very practical steps we can take to protect our oceans and coastal ecosystems. For example, we can reduce other local stressors such as destructive fishing and reduce land-based sources of pollution. We must see mangroves and wetlands as our carbon allies, as they take up carbon dioxide and store it in their biomass and soils. So let us agree today to put a stop to the increasing destruction of coastal wetlands. For when we make the right choices to support our ecosystems, we invariably create positive growth for our Ocean, our health, and our industries.

Politically, it is extremely important that the momentum built in Paris be maintained. Keeping global temperature increases below 1.5 degrees Celsius is not a choice, but an absolute necessity. Yet, the most recent analysis suggests the collective Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are leading us towards a world that by 2100, will be hotter by three to four degrees Celsius.

This shows that climate change is something that we are completely unable to tackle on our own, by ourselves. We recognise that all countries must determine their level of commitment through their NDCs. At the same time, we all have a role to play in seeking the greatest level of ambition from all Parties to the Paris Agreement. We understand that there are challenges for all countries, but through cooperation in good faith we can overcome these. But promises are not enough, now is the time for action and we must all act now.

The need to work together on key challenges facing the Pacific region is emphasised in the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' endorsement of the "Blue Pacific" identity. The Blue Pacific identity reinforces the potential of shared ownership of the Pacific Ocean and reaffirms the connection of Pacific peoples with their natural resources, environment and livelihoods. Therefore, securing the well-being and potential of the Blue Pacific is at the centre of the Forum agenda.

At the top of its sustainable development priorities, are climate change and resilience, as well as fisheries. Among the security priorities for the region are: human security, prioritising environmental security and building resilience to climate change and natural disasters, as well as environment contamination, including impacts on the health of our Ocean and seas that we recognise as our main means and source of our livelihoods and well-being. To successfully meet the challenge of securing the well-being and potential of the Blue Pacific requires that we maintain a strong and collective voice, a regional position and action, and a common foreign policy on priority issues vital to our development as one Blue Pacific continent.

Though the Pacific Islands, as a group, may be the planet's most vulnerable nations to the effects of climate change, this has not detracted the attention of the Leaders from moving forward with plans aimed at adapting and creating greater resilience to climate change and also from natural hazards. This was showcased with the Forum Leaders' endorsement of the governance arrangements for the Pacific Resilience Partnership in 2017 in Apia, to support the implementation of the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific. Following COP 21, state parties announced NDCs post-2020 and we in Samoa, like our friends and neighbours across the region, are taking decisive action, as exemplified below.

Samoa has demonstrated significant commitment to addressing climate change, both in adapting to its impacts and mitigating – or reducing – greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming by establishing a target of generating 100 per cent of its electricity from renewable energy sources and then to maintain this 100 per cent contribution through to 2025, in anticipation of the increasing electricity demand. Renewable energy options operational in Samoa through government include a wind farm, nine mini hydro schemes, and five solar power plants which are supplemented by four solar private partnerships. To date, renewable energy penetration is 81 per cent of the total generation capacity. Our target capability for solar power is 28 kilowatt hours. While we are only at

the 50 per cent mark, I wish to note that over weekends we are able to achieve 100 per cent generation from solar power.

Similarly, at the United Nations Oceans Conference, Samoa submitted 13 voluntary contributions – and I share with you brief outlines of a few of these, as follows.

The Sa Moana Folauga is a voyage to build capacity and awareness on environment and natural resource management and to revive our voyaging heritage in communities in Samoa. This is to ensure communities are better ocean stewards through establishing marine protected areas and sustainable use of marine resources as well as switching to renewable energy alternatives to reduce carbon emissions.

Samoa was one of the first Pacific Island Countries to declare its waters a sanctuary for sharks, whales, dolphins and turtles in 2003. These highly migratory charismatic species form an important part of our heritage and biodiversity, however, as you all know, these species are increasingly becoming threatened. The Aleipata and Safata Districts are important marine protected areas of Samoa.

Scientific research, monitoring and education programmes were created to promote public awareness and to foster a marine ethic of conservation and stewardship.

Support for the marine protected areas are provided through the National Ocean & Marine Committee (NOMC) which oversees our Ocean and marine development activities and help to ensure a better understanding of the costs and benefits of national marine protected areas and the Marine Sanctuary.

The significance of oceanic fisheries to the Pacific Island Countries is manifested not only in economic growth, but also in the food security of their populations. License fees for distant-water fishing nations contribute up to 40 per cent of government revenue for seven Pacific Island Countries. The effects of climate change on tuna are that it determines where national and foreign fishing fleets will have to go, as well as who will receive the total license fees from the distant-water fishing nations. Projected changes in the tropical Pacific Ocean are likely in the future, which means that tuna spawning grounds will be affected and that tuna movements will likely occur towards the eastern Pacific. This is already evident during El Niño Southern Oscillation events.

Some adaptation measures in place include good fish management practices such as maintaining fish stocks at healthy levels.

Samoa has enacted legislation that prohibits the use of destructive fishing methods, including explosives, some traditional fishing methods and driftnet fishing activities in Samoa's waters. This will ensure the preservation of marine habitats to support the population and recruitment of fisheries resources.

Similarly, coastal fisheries will also be affected by climate change. Impacts will likely result in the reduction of availability of food and livelihood opportunities for coastal communities due to the losses of coral reef, mangrove, seagrass and other intertidal habitats that provide food and shelter for coastal fish and shellfish.

Some of the adaptation measures put in place by Samoa include the restoration of vegetation in catchments and care for coastal fish habitats.

Samoa is looking more to enhancing management of its fisheries through improved scientific information and knowledge. The objective is to increase knowledge on stock status of highly migratory fish stocks in the western and central Pacific Ocean for sound management decisions.

In that connection, Samoa works with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in extracting biological samples from tuna species harvested by fishing vessels operating in Samoa's exclusive economic zone for analysis by SPC's Oceanic Fisheries Programme. The results will increase knowledge on the movement of tuna species in the western and central Pacific Ocean and will help us understand further biological characteristics of tuna species that are very important for stock assessment work. It will also help countries make informed decisions so as not to risk breaching their limit reference points.

Additionally, Samoa has implemented measures to minimize the accidental catch of non-targeted species in its commercial fishery, so it would have a minimal impact on the wider ecosystem. This includes measures such as the use of circle hooks for the longline fishery to minimize incidental catches of sea turtles and the use of devices to aid in the live release of sea turtles when accidentally caught.

We are committed to ensure that mangroves, as important marine ecosystems which provide social, economic and cultural benefits for many Pacific Island communities, coastal protection and ocean biodiversity, are protected and conserved.

Mangroves are recognised as flagship ecosystems for livelihoods, climate change adaptation and biodiversity. However, they are threatened from over-harvesting, removal in favour of other developments, pollution, use as wastelands, natural phenomena and other activities.

Awareness, capacity building, research, legislation and the establishment of mangrove marine protected areas inside communities will ensure that mangroves can be rehabilitated and protected for climate change adaptation, livelihoods and biodiversity.

On waste management, the Government of Samoa has enacted the Waste Management Act 2010 as well as the Plastic Bag Prohibition on Importation Regulations 2013 that provide a formal legal framework for the management of waste.

By doing so, Samoa commits to keep its waters clean and healthy from land-based pollution via river and coastal ecosystems. Given that around 80 per cent of marine debris is from land-based sources – and that marine litter is a key environmental challenge for Samoa with around 70 per cent of all litter in Samoa's urban coastal waters comprising plastics (such as packages, containers, bottles and nappies) and most of these being single-use items – cumulatively, they present an enormous threat to Samoa's marine wildlife.

A pilot project is continuing, which offers an opportunity to highlight the issue of marine debris as well as to demonstrate best practice measures for effective waste management, and minimization

of marine debris via the use of marine litter booms and development of waste management infrastructure.

The Samoa Ocean Health Network Initiative provides coordination for oceans and marine work involving all stakeholders to share information and advance Samoa's work on ocean conservation and the sustainable management of ocean resources. The Initiative connects the country mechanism to the regional Pacific Ocean Alliance, under the Forum Leaders' endorsed Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape that considers the sustainable development, management and conservation of the Pacific Ocean and its resources and requires regular reports to Forum Leaders.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As small island developing states and being the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change whether from sea level rise, ocean acidification, coral bleaching, overfishing and marine pollution, our voices and interests should be the basis for global action.

As we strive to address the impacts of climate change, we must at the same time ensure that we invest in the livelihoods of our people. Such challenges and our diversity should be our strength to assist each other in learning from each other's experiences, and best practices. It is in this same spirit of collaboration to address similar challenges that Samoa signed up to the Marine Arctic Peace Sanctuary Treaty in November 2017 that will ensure preserving the unique arctic flora and fauna and thus helping to slow down climate change at this critical time. Pacific Island Countries face numerous challenges with sustainable development. We are small in size and population. We have small markets and limited trade. We are remote and our resource bases are limited. Yet, we have so much to be proud of. Pacific Island Countries have made significant steps forward, and despite our challenges, our economies are growing. We are implementing innovative adaptation measures against climate change impacts. We made considerable progress in moving our economies towards renewable energy, despite being responsible for a tiny proportion of greenhouse gas emissions. COP23 and the United Nations Conference on Oceans demonstrated the importance of the collective support of the Pacific towards the implementation of the Paris Agreement and Call for Action.

But all of our efforts will be meaningless unless there is a concerted and more ambitious effort by all countries to reduce emissions and scale up financial support for adaptation in the most vulnerable countries.

Such a future for our generations to come is avoidable – but by building on the strengths of collective collaboration of the Blue Pacific identity that we have embraced, our smallness will have an expanded outreach, and our collective voice will soar above the roar of the angry tides. The recognition of our "earth without borders" resonates with the need for a global outlook, international cooperation and solidarity, and a shared strategy, to address the challenges we face. After all, as the Honourable Prime Minister of Tuvalu always ardently advocates – "Save Tuvalu and you will save the world".

*Museum Te Papa Tongarewa
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