

Address of Hon. Samuela 'Akilisi Pohiva Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tonga Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Minister for Education and Training To the General Debate of the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly .

Mr. President,

1. I congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the 70th Session of the General Assembly and assure you of our full support. I would also like to thank your predecessor, Mr. Sam Kutesa, for his excellent work, and the Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon for his leadership.

Mr. President,

2. I stand before you humbled by the words of His Holiness, Pope Francis as he addressed this body mere days ago. I am humbled because, in his address, His Holiness the Pope spoke directly to those political issues that occupy us all: those issues that we might easily resolve if only we had more political commitment, more political will. But His Holiness the Pope spoke in a language higher than that of politics, one of morality; of moral imperative. These are principles and ideals that have guided me throughout my life.

3. In this room, we are often guilty of an abstraction we call “political will:” the political will to address climate change, to be careful stewards of our environments, to address devastating global inequalities in development. This abstraction distracts us. It distracts us from our need for moral commitment, for moral courage. It is this language of morality that speaks to the privileged with the imperative, “you must leave no one behind.”

Mr. President,

4. It is in that spirit of moral commitment that I speak to the work my government has undertaken to serve the underserved, and to meet our aspirations as they are presently embodied in the 2030 Agenda.

5. As the first democratically elected representative of the people to the rank of Prime Minister in my country, I am particularly pleased with the inclusion of sustainable development goal 16 related to building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This goal relates to the notion of good governance – the guiding principle of my government under our democracy “fit for purpose”, and a principle that I had always demanded of any government of the day in Tonga throughout my almost 30 years career in politics. Indeed, it is my government’s mantra that good governance, transparency, accountability, and law and order, will drive all other development goals of a country. As such, my government is committing time and resources to strengthening governing institutions through measures such as the establishment of an Anti-Corruption Commission, and considering approaches to removing other challenges and constraints to the sustainable development of the country such as cultural

perceptions and religious dogma.

6. The objectives of good governance, effective accountable and inclusive institutions, are impossible without full support for the human rights of all peoples living in areas of conflict throughout the world including in the Pacific Islands. Tonga reiterates its call for the root causes of such conflict to be resolved by peaceful means, and while fully recognizing the principle of sovereignty of states, Tonga re-emphasizes the need for the protection of the human rights of all persons.

Mr. President,

7. With the Agenda adopted, the central challenge for us at this 70th session of the General Assembly is to translate these aspirations into concrete actions. Our final MDGs Report 2015 revealed that the achievement on the areas of Health and Education has helped to maintain Tonga's position in the Human Development Index. Our people now enjoy an acceptable standard of quality health service; children and young people are able to go to school and advance to higher education. Reducing of Maternal and Child mortality was well achieved in 1970s as a result of early intervention of maternal and child services as well as family planning at 1950s. Our focus would now be shifted one step further towards reproductive health as well as family planning. This approach would eventually safeguard both mother and child simultaneously and maintain our population growth at a balanced manner provided the reproducible pace of natural resources to support us are present. The global threat of NCDs became the worse enemy of the health system in the last two decades. While we have been featured as having amongst the highest prevalence of NCD risk factors, the last two STEPs reports in 2004 and 2012 suggest that Tonga is amongst the leading countries who address NCDs particularly on physical activity, healthy diet and tobacco consumption. Specifically, the physical activity has achieved the "Global Physical Activity Voluntary Target" by 4.6 times and 13 years earlier.

The 14 new priorities for Tonga for the next 15 years as set out in our final MDGs Report, we are pleased to note, are all included in the 17 goals of the Agenda for 2030 which are namely goals, 1 - No Poverty; 3 - Good Health and Well-Being; 4 - Quality Education; 5 - Gender Equality; 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth; 9 - Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure; 10 - Reduced Inequalities; 15 - Life on Land; and 17 - Partnership for the Goals. Therefore I confirm again here my government's full support for the Agenda and, with the assistance of development partners, we will do our utmost to achieve them by 2030. We in Tonga had followed the best practice of the MDGs journey. It was an incredible learning experience for my country and we will adopt these best practices toward our implementation of the new development goals and the Agenda as a whole.

Mr. President,

8. For Tonga, as a Pacific small island developing State, meeting the goals on oceans and seas, climate change, to ensure access to affordable, and sustainable energy for all, and the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. Tonga is also aided by the priorities and commitments set in the SAMOA Pathway that represents an international commitment to genuine and durable partnerships. This was advanced by this year's SIDS

Partnership Dialogue, and the creation of a SIDS Partnership Framework, and in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit assessment of UN System Support for SIDS. The relationship between the SAMOA Pathway and the 2030 Agenda are now well established, and we must maintain the links between these documents as we review our progress.

Mr. President,

9. The SAMOA Pathway is also significant in its central recognition that the challenges that islands such as Tonga face are different, and qualify our country as a “special case” for sustainable development, in need of targeted and tailored support. This message was reaffirmed as means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda advanced, and as can be clearly seen in the outcome document of the third international conference on financing for development, which makes mention of SIDS in 25 paragraphs.

Mr. President,

10. A key piece of the development Agenda remains outstanding, as we look forward to the successful conclusion of negotiations on a climate agreement in Paris at the end of this year. This agreement must reaffirm the ultimate objective of the UNFCCC to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere.

11. Tonga remains highly vulnerable to natural disasters, which continue to increase in frequency and destructiveness. Climate change continues to pose an irreversible threat to our people, our society, our livelihoods, and our natural environment. In this regard, we welcome the dialogues having taken place at the Security Council and a side event to be hosted by the Foreign Ministers of France and Germany tomorrow afternoon, touching upon the security implications of climate change, and support recognition of the links between our climate and international peace and security. We reaffirm our support for the call to the Secretary-General to appoint a special representative on climate and security to thoroughly research and report on those links.

12. Tonga’s vulnerability to natural disasters reemphasizes the SIDS special case for sustainable development and therefore such vulnerabilities should be factored into development finance calculations designed to assist SIDS. Currently, the use of GDP per capita as the basis for determining the access of SIDS, to development finance should be replaced with a comprehensive one that recognizes our vulnerability to natural disaster. This move will save Tonga, from increasing its indebtedness in obtaining funds from multilateral institutions for reconstruction in the wake of a cyclone. Currently, Tonga accesses these funds under the condition of 50 percent grant and 50 percent credit. We therefore support the proposal for adopting a new index reflective of our specific and unique national development characteristics.

Mr. President,

13. We remain thoroughly committed to the management and conservation of our ocean and seas. This year, Tonga commenced its term on the Council of the International Seabed

Authority. At home, we have passed legislation related to seabed mining activities within our national jurisdiction under relevant provisions of UNCLOS. We remain committed to the conservation and sustainable use of resources in areas beyond national jurisdiction, and fully support ongoing efforts towards an instrument regarding the same. We thus welcomed the first meeting of the Pacific Ocean Alliance in May this year under the auspices of the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner in Fiji, to discuss positions from governments, the private sector and civil society, on the BBNJ. Within our exclusive economic zone, we continue to combat the problem of IUU fishing. And in welcoming the adoption of SDG 14 on the oceans and seas, we support the proposed triennial UN Ocean and Seas Conference to drive progress on the goal.

Mr. President,

14. As we work to translate our new Agenda into action, we recognize that the development system of the United Nations must adapt to suit our new priorities. We are supportive of efforts to ensure that the UN is “fit for purpose” to implement the 2030 Agenda. We look forward to continued dialogue on longer-term positioning of the UN development system. In the same vein, Tonga is supportive of the continued efforts to reform the Security Council through an intergovernmental process, in the pursuit of a more representative and inclusive body, reflective of, and in line, with today’s realities.

Finally, Mr. President,

15. Ladies and Gentlemen, most of us have come a long way looking with hope for solutions. Our political priorities must not distract us from the call so well embodied in the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one behind.” I re-emphasize that this call speaks to us as Leaders, to work together against injustice and cruel violation of human rights and dignity as in the case of West Papua in Melanesia in the Pacific. This is within our power. It is a choice that those with power and privilege can make. UN has a duty to closely follow up West Papua’s case and necessary actions be taken to stop this brutal and inhumane activities.

We Leaders must rise to a higher moral order beyond interests, and be guided by what is fair and justiciable to all. I am concerned that the message delivered by his Holiness Pope Francis and other World Leaders we have heard in the last few days, may not have been well and truly heard. We have an obligation, a duty, and I echo the challenge: we must meet this moral obligation internationally, regionally, and nationally, or else we will be left behind.

I thank you, Mr. President.