

**SAMOA HIGH COMMISSIONER'S SPEECH AT THE 'CLIMATE CHANGE + BUSINESS
CONFERENCE 2020' IN AUCKLAND - 11 & 12 NOVEMBER, 2020**

1. INTRODUCTION:

For us in the Pacific, Climate Change is *Real*. It is *Serious*. And it is an *Existential Threat*! It is *Real* because people are losing their homes. They are losing their lands, their plantations, their churches, their schools, their hospitals. They are losing their sources of water supply, power supply, agricultural food supplies and seafood stocks.

Climate Change is *Serious* because people are dying from stronger and more frequent Cyclones, Flooding and Bush Fires. It is serious because People are being separated from their Families as they are relocated away from their Villages and from their Communities.

Climate Change is an *Existential Threat* for the Pacific Island Countries as low-lying Islands continue to get washed away. Communities have been dispersed, People will continue to migrate, not only losing their identity in the process but also their cultures and their languages in the long run.

2. THE PACIFIC RESPONSE:

For over two decades the Leaders and Peoples of the Pacific Region have been trying to draw the attention of the world to the dramatic and adverse effects of Climate Change on the Island Countries.

In Paris, the Pacific Leaders aggressively pursued our Region's priorities and made the world see the seriousness of the adverse effects of Climate Change on the Islands and Peoples of the Pacific.

Reflecting the Region's commitment to the Paris Agreement, the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders endorsed the '*Framework for Resilient Development*' in the Pacific in 2016. The Framework's intentions were for the Pacific Region *To prevent and Reduce its Exposure to Risks from Climate Change and Natural Disasters; Achieve Low Carbon Development; and improve Disaster Preparedness, Response, Recovery and Reconstruction.*

In June 2017, the Pacific Leaders rallied to support and influence the outcomes of the inaugural *United Nations Oceans Conference (UNOC)*. A key focus, was on the close links between Ocean and Climate and the need for oceans to become an integral part of the Climate Change Agenda.

The need to work together on key challenges facing the Pacific Region is highlighted in the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' endorsement of the "*Blue Pacific*" identity in 2017. 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, the environment and their livelihoods. Securing the well-being and potential of the *Blue Pacific* is at the centre of the Pacific Island Forum's Agenda.

Several Pacific Island States are the most vulnerable nations to the effects of Climate Change. And, this has increased the focus of the Leaders in moving forward with plans aimed at adapting and creating greater resilience to climate change and natural hazards.

3. SAMOA'S RESPONSE:

For my own country, Samoa, our Prime Minister (currently the most Senior Leader in the Pacific Region) is one of the leading spokespersons on Climate Change issues on the Global Arena.

Following COP 21, Samoa took decisive action to address the impacts of Climate Change in our country. The Government established a target of generating 100% electricity from renewable energy sources by 2025. To date, renewable energy penetration is just over 80 percent of our total electricity generation capacity.

We have continued to build up our capacity and awareness on environment and natural resources management and revived our traditional fishing and voyaging heritage in the communities. This helps to ensure that our 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.

Scientific research, monitoring and education programs have been created to promote public awareness and to foster a marine ethic of conservation and stewardship. Samoa has enacted legislation to prohibit the use of destructive fishing methods (such as explosives) and ban the use of driftnet fishing activities in our waters.

Some of the adaptation measures that we have put in place include the restoration of vegetation in catchment areas and care for coastal fish habitats. Samoa is looking more to enhancing management of its fisheries sector through improved scientific information and knowledge. The objective is to increase knowledge on the status of highly migratory fish stocks (such as Tuna) for sound management decisions.

We are committed to ensuring that our mangroves are protected and conserved, as they are important marine ecosystems which provide social, economic and cultural benefits as well as coastal protection and ocean biodiversity.

“Enhancing Resilience of the Coastal Communities of Samoa to Climate Change” is a five-year Project currently supported by the UNDP with financial assistance from the global *Adaptation Fund*. Under this Program, community-based organisations are able to receive financial assistance to carry out projects related to sustainable *forest management, mangrove conservation and rainfall catchment systems*.

On waste management, our Government has enacted the Waste Management Act as well as Regulations banning the importation of plastic bags.

With financial and technical assistance from our Development Partners and International Organisations, we have built seawalls, strengthen our waterways, built more resilient roads and bridges, help rebuild houses and infrastructure damaged by recent cyclones.

Unfortunately, with the advent of COVID-19 and the resulting devastating effects on the economies of the Island Countries, priorities will now have to change. Unless increased external financial assistance is available, Climate Change resilient and adaptation projects will (unfortunately) need to take lower priority as limited Government revenues are directed towards fighting the new battle of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

4. CONCLUSION:

To conclude, at the Pacific Island Forum Meeting in Tuvalu last year, Forum Leaders (including New Zealand & Australia) adopted a *“The Kainaki II Declaration”* which again highlighted the need for urgent action to reduce the adverse impact of Climate Change on the Island Countries. This the first time that the Forum Leaders have referred to Climate Change as a ‘Crisis’ facing the Pacific Region.

The Pacific Leaders called on all Parties to the Paris Agreement to meet (or even exceed) their *Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)*. They also called for more meaningful mitigation actions and increased transparency on implementation through bilateral, regional and global mechanisms, including the replenishment of the *Green Climate Fund* and the *Adaptation Fund*.

At the same time, it is important that the criteria and processes to access these Global Funds are made simple to facilitate prompt and increased utilisation by Pacific Island Countries.

The Leaders called on the International Community to immediately increase support and assistance for Pacific-led, science-based initiatives, intended to improve understanding of (Climate Change) risks and vulnerabilities.

The Pacific Island Leaders also called on all countries and non-state actors to join with the Blue Pacific in taking bold, decisive and transformative action to address the ever-present challenges of Climate Change.

The devastating effects of COVID-19 on the economies of the Pacific Island Countries have added an even more desperate element to the call on the Leaders of the World to continue the fight against Climate Change.

In his virtual speech to the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly in September this year, our Prime Minister (Hon Tuilaepa Sa’ilele Malielegaoi) again stressed that *“the future is uncertain and compromised if the world continues with the current levels of emissions causing more than 3 degrees of global warming”*

Our Prime Minister added that *“whilst it is the small island states like Samoa that are facing the brunt of the adverse impacts, no country is immune to the reaches of Climate Change”*

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