

**Keynote Address by
Mr. Bakary Kante, Director,
Division of Environmental Law and Conventions,
UNEP on the occasion of the
Pacific Environment Forum 2011**

**Delivered by
Mr. Alphonse Kambu Programme Officer
Division of Environmental Law and Conventions,
UNEP**

12 September 2011

Apia, Samoa

Your Excellency Honourable Fa' amoetauloa Dr. Taito Fa' ale, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Samoa

Excellencies from the Pacific

Mr. David Sheppard, Director, SPREP

Distinguished delegates

Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me start by offering apologies from my bosses, Mr. Achim Steiner and Mr. Bakary Kante for not being here with you in person. Mr. Steiner has to be in New York to chair another meeting this week. And Mr. Kante was off-loaded at the airport due to complications with a transit visa to Australia. Allow me to read a statement that Mr. Kante was supposed to deliver to you today. Before, I start let me express that it is a great honor for me to be here in the beautiful Pacific Island nation of Samoa and to participate in the first Pacific Environment Forum. Let me commend SPREP for initiating this forum and thank you for inviting UNEP to participate.

Let me start with highlighting the sustainability crises that the world is facing today, including food shortages, scarcity of fresh water resources and the decline of biodiversity and ecosystem services at the global and regional levels. It is clear that, from an ecological and social point of view, the sustainability crisis hits hardest the people who live in specific geographical regions and ecosystems such as the small islands developing states (SIDS) and islands ecosystems, including the very poor and the very marginalized where poverty and hunger still afflict a billion or more people on a daily basis.

Addressing global sustainability issues such as, climate change, food security, water shortage and ecosystem services loss is an urgent challenge for the international community. Climate change alone can be considered as one major contributor to this sustainability crisis as it has negative impacts on food production, potable water and other essential needs that support livelihood. Although the political recognition of the impacts of climate change and its contribution to food crisis has been low, it has been acknowledged as a challenge for sustainable development and major obstacle to the achievements of the environmental sustainability and poverty alleviation objectives of the Millennium Development Goals.

I am aware that you in the Pacific are some of the first ones to experience the real impacts of climate change, sea level rise and the problems associated with it and perhaps more than any other region of the world. You know your problems more than some of us and I would not be doing justice by speaking about these problems you are grappling with on a daily basis.

However, to bring into perspective some of these sustainability crises, you may recall that the findings of the second working group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC WG2) show that approximately 90 per cent of the changes to the physical and biological systems of our globe are a consequence of global warming. The fourth assessment report of the IPCC further reinforced that the causes of global warming are caused by human activities.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), concluded in 2005, presents a similar message stating that climate change among other factors is a new and major driver of change to ecosystems and their services. The MA revealed that over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history, primarily to meet the demands for food, fiber, timber, freshwater and fuel. This has caused large and irreversible loss to biodiversity.

Climate change, biodiversity, environmental sustainability and the MDGs as we know are intertwined. The linkages make it even more challenging. Our institutions, policies and strategies must

be framed toward addressing this linkage to ensure a balance among them. A number of response options to reverse the impact of climate change on biodiversity and ecosystem services are available to us. UNEP has worked with partners and governments to address some of these sustainability challenges.

The UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are among the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) that are in place to respond to the challenges. As the linkages become clearer such MEAs need to build synergies and work together to deliver better results.

UNEP encourages governments to seek synergies between and among the major MEAs, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It is crucial to improve the scientific, technical cooperation and information exchange among the three Rio conventions (CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD), especially their scientific subsidiary bodies. One such opportunity that UNEP is supporting is the modalities for joint reporting by the parties to the three Rio conventions. In addition, the ACP project which is jointly implemented by UNEP and SPREP for the Pacific is intended to achieve a synergistic approach to implementing the MEAs better.

In this perspective, countries are called upon to integrate these strategies in implementing the MEAs. However, the complexity of the issues can be a challenge for them given their limited capacity in terms of administrative, technical and financial shortcomings. The problem of the lack of capacity of countries is permanent and must be addressed constantly. We also know that the need and challenge is far greater for the small islands developing states.

The need to build and strengthen the capacities of the disadvantaged countries to address the impact of climate change on biodiversity, whether it is through the implementation of MEAs or through adaptation and mitigation initiatives, is a crucial mission for us. In light of the capacity building needs for countries, the UNEP Governing Council has adopted a decision on technology transfer and capacity building for developing countries in Bali, Indonesia in 2005. UNEP has been mandated by its Governing Council to implement the Bali Strategic Plan and has been carrying it out in various aspects to address some of the sustainability challenges.

In coping with the sustainability crisis, it is crucial to make effective use of scientific knowledge and information by bringing together advanced technologies, indigenous knowledge and traditional methods. This will also involve North-South and South-South cooperation by sharing expertise, in particular, the experiences of developed countries to address this crisis. There is an urgent need for significant initiative that combines traditional methods of conservation and cost-effective technologies adapted to specific local conditions in order to tackle sustainability crisis. Information exchange and sharing of best practices are crucial for developing countries.

Environmental, economic and social crises the world is experiencing today demand governments, international development agencies, and civil society groups to form partnerships and explore innovative and integrated solutions aimed at greening the world economy. These solutions will require investment in clean technologies and building the green economy which creates jobs and opportunities.

As you are probably aware, the UNEP led Green Economy Initiative is aimed at analyzing and providing policy support for investment in green sectors and in greening environmental unfriendly sectors. It is important for the sustenance of direct and indirect benefits yielded, which needs to be maintained by environmentally-friendly approaches, partly through provision of advisory services to governments and research by agencies through the UN. The Green Economy Report has contributed to the analysis of implications of green investment in SIDS, in industries such as the tourism and fisheries, which contribute significantly to the countries' economies.

Sustainable management of terrestrial and marine ecosystems also contributes positively to fundamental ecosystem services such as regulating water cycles, sequestering carbon, and helping to preserve biodiversity. However, sustainable management of ecosystems is a global challenge that requires solutions that cut across policy, socio-economic and environmental sectors at all levels.

It is also important to promote mainstreaming gender, youth and local communities into sustainable resources management. Addressing the sustainability crises will require tackling gender, youth and local community concerns and building their capacity and integrating them in policy and decision-making processes that impact their lives.

Furthermore, we need to strengthen the links between environment and development in order to alleviate poverty and create better employment opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed in developing countries. It is important that governments invest more resources than in the past to enhance sustainable natural resources management in order to generate more global benefits in the light of challenges the world is experiencing today.

It has become evident that some of the global environmental problems we are facing today like climate change, habitat loss, land degradation and water shortage can be linked to governance challenges. Our existing institutional, legal and policy frameworks have not responded adequately to the sustainability crises. Institutions are weaker in that they do not possess adequate support structures to address the environmental sustainability crises. Existing laws and policies lack effective enforcement and implementation.

If we want to influence real changes and reverse the sustainability crises we need to strengthen our governance, institutional, legal and policy frameworks. In this regard, UNEP has put in place a process for reform of the international environmental governance which will be part of the Rio+20 discussions next year in addition to the Green Economy.

I am sure you will agree that stronger governance frameworks are crucial to tackle problems like climate change and its impacts such as sea level rise and ecosystem degradation and loss affecting not only the Pacific Islands countries but the whole world. Furthermore, stronger governance frameworks are needed to allow for approaches such as the Green Economy to function well in order to benefit the global community and especially the poor and underprivileged members of our community.

The discussions for the Forum today are relevant and will address some of these challenges and approaches to improving the sustainability crises in the Pacific. UNEP as the lead UN Agency mandated to work with the member states of the United Nations system on global environmental issues has been just doing this in various areas with partners to alleviate the sustainability crises.

Finally, UNEP is still committed to working with the Pacific Islands countries, SPREP and other partners in addressing the problems of climate change, biodiversity loss and other challenges through some of its programmes and initiatives, such as the Green Economy Initiative or the International Environmental Governance Reform. I sincerely wish for us a fruitful outcome of the forum.

Thank You
