

## **Opening Remarks, Pacific Environment Forum**

Hon. Fa'amoetauloa Lealaiauloto Taito Ulaitino Dr F. Tumaali'i

***Minister of Natural Resources and Environment***

- Hon. Ministers of Environment from French Polynesia, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu
- Director of SPREP
- Director of the Division of Environmental Law and Governance, UNEP
- Country delegates
- Members of the Diplomatic Corp
- Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to deliver the Opening Remarks at the First Pacific Environment Forum. The Forum Agenda Topics clearly reflect the broad scope and the magnitude of the issues that are critical and pertinent to us in the Pacific. There can be no doubt, that as we work towards addressing some of our pressing environment and development management issues, we are also being faced with – newly emerging challenges.

The Forum today provides us with an opportunity to share our views, ideas and experiences on some of these issues. It is also an opportunity for us to explore and define practical ways and solutions - to address these issues in an integrated and holistic manner that is relevant and appropriate to our own Pacific context – and provide input to the different international and regional processes that we are party to.

Specifically on the emphasis of this Forum, may I share with you my views and perspectives on the main discussion topics;

In July this year (2011), I had the pleasure of hosting and chairing a regional gathering of my ministerial colleagues from environment, Finance and Fisheries as well as other distinguished participants at the Rio+20 Pacific Preparatory Meeting. The outcomes from that meeting form the basis of the Outcomes Document from PSIDS that carry forward to national, regional and global preparatory conferences toward Rio+20.

I am informed that this Outcomes Document is one of the key documents for this forum and I urge that you consider it and further develop the issues raised – in order to continue to assist countries to formulate their national submissions to the Rio+20 process by the fast approaching 1<sup>st</sup> November 2011 deadline.

### **For me the key messages we want to convey are:**

The Pacific wants a “Green Economy in a Blue World”. We applaud the efforts of our missions in New York in successfully getting the “Blue Economy” onto the Rio+20 Agenda and we should all be supporting them to ensure it is given the focus and status it deserves.

We in the Pacific are reviewing our own commitment for sustainable development by adopting a “Green Economy in a Blue World” approach – as an inclusive and practical way of promoting the right kind of growth, meeting our key challenges – in particular, climate change and waste management. Valuable lessons can also be learnt from the sustainable lifestyles that have long been practiced by our people

and communities, whose wellbeing and cultures are intrinsically linked to the natural resources and biodiversity of their islands.

Occupying one third of the earth's surface, the Pacific Ocean is not only a Pacific but a global asset. This global resource is under threat and while we have done much at the national and regional levels to sustainably develop, manage and conserve – the Pacific Ocean and its resources; The international community also needs to take immediate steps to strengthen the governance of oceans so that the global community can sustainably manage this global resource. Pacific SIDS need to get a fair share of the benefits derived from the utilization of these resources. They should also be rewarded and compensated for the revenues they have foregone in order to protect and preserve ocean resources by declaring large marine protected areas for conservation and for nurseries for sustaining essential fish stocks such as tuna.

PSIDS are also acutely aware that although they are not responsible for climate change and the financial, fuel and food crises facing the world, these have the impact of delaying or even jeopardizing their development gains while also threatening the survival of many island nations and communities. They recognize that they have little control over the carbon emissions and excessive resource use that result from unsustainable production and consumption patterns in industrialized countries. They are deeply concerned that current levels of economic activity will cause a temperature rise of greater than 1.5 degrees which will not only destroy coral reefs and ecosystems, and undermine resources of livelihood for Pacific peoples – but will also threaten the very existence of some of the Pacific countries. The international community must accept that it bears the moral responsibility and in turn the financial burden for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The special consideration given to SIDS has been a prominent feature of both the United Nations Conferences on Environment and Development and the World Summit for Sustainable Development. The Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy have provided a framework by which SIDS have taken significant steps to address their sustainable development challenges. However as evidenced by the recent Pacific regional report for the 5 year review of the Mauritius Strategy, the special vulnerabilities of Pacific SIDS remain and in some cases have increased as a result of climate change impact, natural disasters and the recent financial food and fuel crises. Pacific SIDS therefore reaffirms the need to maintain a special consideration of SIDS at Rio+20.

While there has been a considerable development of global financing mechanisms, by and large, developed nations have not met their commitments to funding sustainable development or climate change mitigation and adaptation. IN addition, funds that have been channeled through global funding architecture have not been designed to accommodate the capacity constraints of SIDS. As a result, SIDS have not been able to access these funds effectively. Pacific SIDS therefore seeks agreement by the international community to improve access to funds for the transformation of their economies; and to ease the reporting burden faced by small island administrations.

### **Environmental Governance in the Pacific**

We in the Pacific are fortunate that we still maintain to a large extent our traditions and practices that govern the way we manage and use our natural resources. We have also developed modern and contemporary systems. Community ownership and leadership is at the core of environmental governance particularly because most of our lands are customary owned. Many of our national policies and strategies are meaningless if our communities are not part of. In Samoa, the village councils play a key role in natural resource management and we have had some good successes particularly with the

establishment of marine protected areas at the village and district levels. This is just one example to illustrate how village governing systems can be effective in managing our natural resources. We have also developed Village By-Laws to manage our fishery resources which is an example of how village governing systems can be integrated with modern legal systems. Within our communities, women, men, youths and other groups play key roles as part of the village governance systems. We must always consider the views of the different groups that make up our communities and societies. At the national level, many of our countries in the Pacific have developed a number of national environmental legislations and policies. These have been developed through intensive consultations with communities and key stakeholders. This reiterates the importance of involving everyone in setting national priorities as these are the same people who are expected to implement these policies.

At the regional level, we have developed, adopted and are implementing regional environmental policies and plans that fosters collaboration and cooperation among countries with a shared vision and desire to achieve collective common goods for the betterment of our Pacific countries and people.

Similarly at the international level, our countries and our region are engaged in various dialogues and forums voicing our issues and informing the countries of the world of our own unique situations including our challenges.

As we embrace new knowledge and ways of doing things, it is important that we should not lose focus of our own traditional practices but work towards finding innovative ways that integrates the best of both traditional and modern governance systems.

### **Adapting to climate change**

Climate change remains a fundamental threat to the survival of Pacific Islands Countries and communities, and impacts are being documented throughout the region. For the lower lying atoll countries it is a threat to their very existence, while countries like Samoa with the majority of our economic activities in the coastal areas face severe threats as well. Relocation of entire government offices, utilities, businesses and other infrastructure would be immensely costly and quite impossible in some cases. We therefore have to consider adaptation options that would protect what we have for the near and medium term. IN this regard Samoa has undertaken an in-depth consultative process that resulted in each of the communities of our country establishing Coastal Infrastructure Plans. These plans are community driven and detail options for adaptation and protection of these communities are given. Several of these have been included for financing under the Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change project, while others will be covered by other funding opportunities such as the World Bank Pilot Project for Climate Resilience.

Similar approaches have been taken by other Pacific Island Countries and it is gratifying to learn that the PACC activities around the region are progressing well. But we all know that these activities are just the tip of the iceberg, while at the same time we acknowledge that our capacity constraints will not allow us to carry out all activities needed at the same time. Prioritization is a must, and needs to have community inputs as well as expert advice.

Given the current rates of greenhouse gas emissions, climate change will be affecting us now and into the future. It is therefore important that we have in place national and regional structures to assist the Pacific Island Countries.

In this regard the Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change (PIFACC) provides the vision and goals for adaptation as well as other climate change interventions.

In terms of implementing tangible, on-ground adaptation measures, the PIFACC will assist with:

- Enhanced resilience to the adverse effects of climate change through the implementation of best practice adaptation and risk reduction measures.
- Improved access, and
- Management and dissemination of equitable amounts of climate change financing at regional, national and community levels.
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These approaches will increase the adaptive capacity of socio-economic and biophysical systems through measures designed to reduce the adverse effects of climate change on key development sectors in the food production and food security sector, coastal and the water sectors. Emphasis should be placed on on-the-ground implementation, building capacity and institutional structures and decision systems to enable these sectors to better cope with current variability and long-term climate change impacts. We should take advantage of tools that had been developed under the PACCC project such as the vulnerability and risk assessment, planning processes, guidelines for socio-economic assessments and mainstreaming.

Threats to key biodiversity ecosystems, habitats and threatened species of plants and animals also need to be taken into consideration in adaptation work as part of a holistic and integrated approach that takes into consideration Ecosystem based Adaptation to enhancing climate change resilient systems. It is encouraging to note that there is an increasing recognition of the role biodiversity conservation and ecosystems play in helping to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Mangroves and coral reefs provide coastal protection and reduce the impacts of cyclones and storm surges and extreme weather events. Many communities in the Pacific including Samoa are engaged in mangrove replanting, coral reef rehabilitation including the expansion of networks of marine protected areas to ensure these critical ecosystems are well maintained and continue to support and sustain our livelihoods while at the same time enhance protection from impacts of climate change, sea level rise and extreme events. In this regard, I would like to underscore the need to put in place effective policy frameworks and increase financial resources to further harness the contributions that biodiversity and ecosystems provide in strengthening our resilience to the impacts of climate change.

### **Conclusion**

We have ahead of us a very challenging and ambitious agenda. However, I am confident that as participants to this Forum, we can each play a key part and contribute to the discussions. Your active participation and substantive input will form the basis for a successful Forum outcome. Let us harness this opportunity to further enhance our collective efforts for a sustainable environment for the people of the Pacific now and in the future. With those words, I now officially open the first Pacific Environment Forum.

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