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**United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed
Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing
States
(UN-OHRLLS)**

**Opening Remarks
by
Ms. Fekitamoelea Katoa 'Utoikamanu
High-Representative
And
Under-Secretary-General**

**for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and
Small Island Developing States**

Pacific Small Island Developing States Regional Preparatory Meeting

Taufa'ahau Tupou IV Domestic Terminal and Wharf Facility

Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga

19 June 2018

Hon Akilisi Pohiva, Prime Minister of Tonga & Minister of Foreign Affairs
Hon Ministers
Rev Ungatea Kata
Excellencies Permanent Representatives to the UN & Resident Heads of Mission
Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Senior Government Officials
UN colleagues
Representatives of regional and international organizations
Distinguished guests, friends,
Ladies and gentlemen

What a wonderful privilege and true honor to be you all.

At the outset I want to express our heartfelt appreciation to the Government and people of Tonga for hosting our meeting and for the generous hospitality that has been extended to all of us since our arrival

I want to also extend our warmest congratulations to Mahe Tupouniua on his appointment as Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

I also wish to acknowledge the generous support and financial contributions of the government of New Zealand, Canada and Norway that has enabled the regional consultations and international consultations to take place.

This meeting is YOURS - it will be driven by your knowledge, experience, and thoughts.

Allow me to also share some thoughts with you for this opening ceremony of our very important Pacific Small Island Developing States Regional Preparatory Meeting.

Almost four years ago, here in the Pacific, global leaders adopted the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action or

the SAMOA Pathway.

The SAMOA Pathway reaffirmed that SIDS are a so called “special case” for sustainable development.

Those of us- let me say of a certain age, we do remember all too well how in 1992 the pathbreaking Rio conference and then the Barbados Conference really brought the complex and special SIDS issues to the forefront.

That is already 26 years ago! It would be an understatement to say that since the SIDS and the world have experienced major, repeated and may be all too often highly disruptive changes.

We then in Mauritius in 2005 held the second SIDS Conference.

This resulted in a kind of renewed impetus and commitment by the entire international community for the pressing issues the SIDS face.

The SAMOA Pathway set out a comprehensive blueprint for action.

Action by ALL stakeholders is called for - so that means action by the 193 member states of the United Nations in the key priority areas for SIDS. This is a global agreement.

It really is important to stress that we talk about a global commitment- and not a commitment solely by the SIDS!

This comprehensive and participatory process then lead to the 2014 SIDS Conference.

Since then, further global commitments all built on the SAMOA pathway.

Foremost, it is the global communitys agreed on comprehensive and probably most ambitious integrated sustainable development agenda - our Agenda 2030 - together with the Paris Climate Change Agreement.

We though must not lose sight of the fact that it is the SAMOA Pathway that is *THE* International Framework spelling out the sustainable development direction and aspirations of the SIDS for present and future generations.

I did not mention these successive steps taken over the past 26 years to give you a history lesson.

I think it is important to see the context, the changes in context and may be raise the question squarely here at our meeting:

do we have time for another 26 years to take ACTION?

This gathering here in Nuku'alofa has one goal. It is YOUR meeting and YOUR opportunity to assess progress in achieving ambitions set.

It is YOUR meeting to take stock of what works, did not work, and why and very importantly to recommend what now must be done. And again, the emphasis is on workable proposals for ACTION;

It is indeed YOUR meeting to chart regional priorities for action.

I think we all agree that we MUST accelerate IMPLEMENTATION of the SAMOA Pathway over the coming five years.

The gathering is also designed to look at the synergies and complementarity between the SAMOA Pathway and other internationally and regionally agreed on frameworks for sustainable development.

So, we are here together in response to the mandate of General Assembly resolution 72/217 - and that means the global community - calling on OHRLLS, DESA and regional commissions to facilitate regional preparatory meetings to review progress in the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Since 1992- since Rio and then Barbados - all of the SIDS know the ever increasing toll of climate change and ocean degradation on our people, land and livelihoods.

Extreme weather events have become a recurrent and ever more dangerous threat.

For some Pacific countries climate change is now a truly existential issue. It is “ live or die “ .

While it is good that the international community has picked up on this through documentaries, while countries like Tuvalu and Kiribati and most recently H.E. Hilda Heine at the G7 have become clear and outspoken on the existential dangers SIDS face, the bottom line remains:

graduation out of LDCs status is also an important issue as four Pacific countries are at various stages of the graduation process. Vanuatu is scheduled to graduate in 2020 following a deferment due to cyclone Pam.

That cyclone alone rolled back years of development progress in a matter of minutes!

Indeed, the critical measure of success of the implementation of the Paris Agreement will be its impact on Small Islands, especially in the Pacific.

Pacific islands are custodians to large ocean spaces. Just think, some nearly 73 per cent of our shared earth are covered in oceans!

Oceans play a major role in climate and its formation. Oceans for islands are part of our lands and livelihoods.

It is critical to protect the ocean, our heart, from the many threats ranging from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing to ocean pollution and the unsustainable use of marine resources.

We need to take beyond urgent action to reverse the ever accelerating decline of our oceans' health.

Business as usual is not an option. It is neither the time nor do we have the luxury of time for business as usual.

26 years have gone by since Rio - 26 years of major political, social, economic, financial and climate related changes.

We cannot bury our heads into either the sands nor ocean . The reality is that we are far from where we would need to be on ACTION.

We can and we must do better. We have one shared responsibility: we must DELIVER on the objectives set forth in the SAMOA Pathway. That is what we owe our girls and boys, men and women.

This will require focus, just plain hard work, innovation, speed and it will require resources exceeding the limited scope for domestic resource mobilization.

International cooperation, multi-lateral cooperation in their broadest sense have a critical role to play.

This will take all forms of partnerships. We must involve the private sector. Genuine, equitable and durable partnerships must be forged to address the challenges facing SIDS. Partnerships that help the effective integration of SIDS in the global value chain.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

You may wonder what OHRLLS as your partners since has been doing to support you in your endeavors.

Allow me to take up three issues: VOICE, COORDINATION and IMPLEMENTATION.

OHRLLS foremost is, on behalf of H.E. Antonio Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, a VOICE for 91 countries and some over one billion people. OHRLLS is a VOICE for SIDS, is YOUR voice together with our partners like AOSIS.

Within the UN-system, OHRLLS works to mobilise the collective strength of the UN system.

The member states have asked OHRLLS to leverage the support of all funds, programs and agencies to support SIDS.

The global community and our shared planet face almost unprecedented challenges.

The Secretary-General has embarked on ensuring that the United Nations is ready to assist you better. The tools of last century we had can not meet the challenges of the world already upon us or those of the future.

It is more important than ever for the entire UN system to better serve the needs of the Member States, and deliver more effectively and efficiently. You are in the driver's seat and we must add value to your work.

OHRLLS collaborates with various entities of the UN system on a range of substantive areas identified by you.

OHRLLS is actively working in the broadband commission recognizing how important connectivity is to the SIDS and their peoples.

OHRLLS actively works in the area of clean energy access and we are a member of UN Oceans.

OHRLLS has also established a network of SIDS national focal points. We felt that to accelerate action, to ensure the SDGs can be met by 2030 we had to strengthen linkages between the national, regional and global levels of action.

Then, OHRLLS has initiated a series of activities on private -sector promotion as well as Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) models for SIDS.

As I said before, we need to notch up our partnership work - as the saying goes “nobody can go it alone- it will truly take a village! “.

I am happy to share that the membership of the SIDS Global Business Network has expanded. I hope it will trigger increased and better exchange between private sector actors and SIDS.

OHRLLS now also is a full-fledged actor of the World Bank-led Small States Forum (SSF).

Above all, let me assure you that OHRLLS and I personally will spare no effort to be your VOICE! You can count on us.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The clock is ticking and it is ticking very fast ! Time for action is NOW.

Allow me in concluding to quote an old Tongan proverb

Ala ‘i Sia, Ala ‘i Kolonga

While this proverb is in reference to snaring of pigeons - heu Lupe. And the Sia is the mound on which the pigeons were trapped and the kolonga is the cooking place, and while it refers to settings past it has relevance to our times. In our context we can say it is a proverb honoring those who are adaptable in various environments, new places or situations.

Let us be those who knew how to adapt and I count on you all in this meeting to guide us on what now has to be done to make the SAMOA Pathway happen.

I wish you a successful meeting and look forward to listening to you and working with you.

Thank you.