Keynote address

Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu

High Representative
and
Under- Secretary- General
Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States

AOSIS / LDC Event
“Leading the Way: Raising Ambition for Climate Action”

Gran Mors, 22 Warren Street
New York
16:30-18:30
20 September 2019
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It always is both a privilege and responsibility to deliver a keynote statement. But it is even more so at this important moment on the eve of the Secretary-General’s Climate Action Summit! and also just before other critical gatherings in this week’s series of Summits on sustainable development.

For months, countless experts in government, the private sector, civil society organizations and academia have done groundwork for the truly critical next few days.

People across the world answered the call to join young people and take part in the “Global Climate Strike”.

I think one critical step is taken - the sense of urgency and the sense that we must ACT and no longer hide behind words are firmly entrenched in people's minds and hearts.

AOSIS and the LDC groups have contributed a lot to this growing awareness by your extraordinary efforts in the lead-up to the Summit to ensure that our collective voice is heard and by leading the way in terms of ambition.

So, I wish to acknowledge the efforts of the Chair of AOSIS, the Chair of the LDCs in New York and the Chair of the LDCs in Bonn, as well as all the AOSIS and LDCs members that have co-led the Summit’s nine action areas, supported the coalitions and come forward with collective and individual initiatives.

Thank you all!

What unites us is that we truly are in the frontline of the climate change impacts and already so for a long time!

There is no need to recall the growing list of truly catastrophic climate-related disasters in just recent years - Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Dominica, Lao PDR, Malawi, Puerto Rico, Somalia, Tanzania, or indeed my own country Tonga.

Our nations are not among what we call traditionally the most powerful.
But we have strength in numbers!

There are 44 states and observers of AOSIS and an additional 41 states from the LDC group. Do the maths!

While the populations of SIDS are small, the LDCs total one billion.

The strongest asset we have is to speak loudly, put our facts on the table and remain a united voice. We have done so, we must continue to do so, we must never waiver.

The IPCC Special Report on 1.5 Degrees is crystal clear on the extent and severity of expected climate change impacts. That is what is expected but think of what the SIDS and LDCs already experience since by times decades!

Now, mitigation, being pro-active rather than reacting after the fact at very high costs, yes it COSTS. And these are costs the often small-size and fragile economies cannot bear alone.

The need for finance per se and the need to expedite and simplify finance access is a TOP PRIORITY.

Access to concessional finance for reconstruction following climate-related disasters, irrespective of the per capita income category of a country is an equal priority.

We are talking survival and not luxury. We are talking stability rather than letting countries slide into instability. We are talking basic human rights.

International assistance must go beyond addressing immediate humanitarian emergencies over and over again and must step in to share the costs of longer-term re-building as well as loss and damage.

I applaud but above all support the broad array of initiative and pledges for ambitious climate change action by AOSIS and the LDCs.

The SIDS and LDCs' greenhouse gas emissions are low compared to the OECD countries. Yet, and once again at the forefront, AOSIS and LDCs will announce plans for low greenhouse gas emission development strategies – through the “SIDS
2020 Ambition Leadership Coalition” and the “LDC 2050 Vision: towards a climate resilient future”.

You lead with vision, care and truly by example. Your leadership will provide strong incentives to the rest of the world to follow suit.

Over and over I hear it myself and we all can see it - young people tell us they have heard enough words, they want action.

In the coming days, we must ensure a united voice and call for action. The call must resonate not only at the Climate Action Summit, but throughout the week until the SAMOA High-level MTR.

We must leverage this week to build additional partnerships and forge further alliances – with Member States, private sector leaders, academia, youth groups and civil society alike.

We ALL are concerned, we all are in the proverbial same boat and none of us has a plan B for our shared planet.

We must ensure that the momentum for action generated this week continues beyond the General Assembly High-level week. We must ensure it translates into concrete commitments in the NDCs for all. This is after all a truly multi-lateral, truly cross- border issue.

We must ensure we show our young generations that we ACT.

We must act TOGETHER and that means mobilizing the private sector, which has such a critical role to play in coming up with and sharing the technological innovation needed to shift away from fossil-fuel based economies and societies.

Engagement at the highest political level is a must and must happen at all possible occasions and fora.

COP25 in Santiago will be but only the first such opportunity.
My Office will be there and beyond to support these efforts.

I would like to conclude by sharing with you a point made by H.E. Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados when she delivered the 16th Raúl Prebisch Lecture at UNCTAD last week in Geneva.
She argued that if vulnerable countries such as the SIDS were themselves to finance the costly process of building resilience, they would have to borrow more to do so. This would increase their debt to GDP ratio, and thereby impact negatively on their credit rating. The net effect would be simply to shift environmental vulnerability to economic vulnerability.

So, let us not fall into such vicious circle - we need a virtuous circle with no more time to squander.

Thank you.