Opening Remarks

for

Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu

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

Remarks at High-Level Meeting on Pathways and Partnerships to Leverage the Energy Transition for Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development Co-Benefits in SIDS

Venue: West Terrace, Delegates’ Dining Room

UNHQ, New York
27 September 2019
8:00 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.
Heads of States,
Heads of Government,
Ministers,
Excellencies, Distinguished delegates and colleagues,
Valued partners,

Thank you for joining us for this breakfast meeting right before the opening of the Samoa Pathway Midterm Review.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to IRENA, Palau and AOSIS for co-organizing this important meeting.

What a critical week this already has been and continues to be.

We started with the Climate Action Summit, the HLPF on Sustainable Development, the Financing for Development Summit, and ultimately the SAMOA Pathway Midterm Review.

Throughout, the SIDS have inspired us all, they have expressed with one shared voice their development concerns: the bottom line being that small islands are on the front line of climate change and many face extinction.

As people all over the world demand climate action NOW, my office continues to advocate for climate resilience in SIDS.

I want to address the serious reality in SIDS. We once talked about climate resilience - by now for SIDS more than anyone else, climate resilience has become synonymous with disaster resilience.

This month we saw one of the strongest hurricanes in the history of Atlantic storms hit The Bahamas. Unprecedented loss of life occurred as did serious physical damages. We do not yet know how long it will take to restore what was destroyed and by now, who knows when the next hurricane strikes?

And this is not just happening in the countries of my Office – it is happening literally everywhere.

One factor that can and will make a difference is what we are here to discuss: energy.

We are all familiar with the damage caused to the peoples' of the SIDS by the fossil fuel economy: total vulnerability to volatile market prices, prohibitively high costs of doing business, disadvantage in the global economy, and the world’s highest electricity prices. And I am not even talking about micro- air pollution and the serious health hazards this triggers.

There can not be the old way of doing or going about business. This is absolutely unsustainable for SIDS – socially, economically, and environmentally.
Access to renewable energy is a difference-maker. It is a difference maker in building resilience. The transition from fossil fuels to clean energy is a move from high-risk, high cost power centres to distributed, diversified, independent systems. If disaster comes, the nature of renewable systems means that failures here and there, do not trigger collapse everywhere.

At the same time, renewable energy can greatly contribute to sustainable socio-economic wellbeing especially in SIDS so challenged by cost and geography.

As renewable technologies continue to decline in cost, this bears the promise to revolutionise the affordability of power, improving demand efficiency and expanding access to the poorest.

Renewables have the potential to reach even the most remote islands.

What will this mean? It means modern communications in remote areas, stronger household savings, greater business competitiveness, access to clean cooking fuels… all of which will result in positive returns to SIDS’ economies, health and social participation. This is development made more affordable and more accessible – keys to achieving the SDGs for all.

And we must particularly focus on young people. Sustainable development is absolutely essential to the youth in SIDS, who bear perhaps the greatest weight of all of us. For the future of SIDS, we need young people to feel that they have promising opportunities in countries that will manage climate change and overcome its challenges. This is the essence of sustainable development. We must use the energy transition to protect and invigorate SIDS so that young islanders have hope, can feel proud, prosperous in their homes.

So, we have the ambition.

We have the ambition, we have the science, we have the technology and we have the political will.

SIDS and partners must now work hand in hand to forge practical, results-oriented pathways.

We need more focus on capacity building and determining the optimal mix of renewable sources for least-cost, reliable systems.

But these systems are not an end in themselves. We must leverage them into inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development for the benefit of all people - young, old, men, women, girls and boys.

SIDS have committed to the world’s most ambitious energy and climate goals. Let us not fail the peoples of the SIDS. Let us not fail our youth.

Partner countries and organizations please do step up urgently your support and share knowledge and expertise.

OHRLLS stands ready to be there with you along the way.
This morning, I signed a Memorandum of Understanding with IRENA to strengthen the collaboration between the two organisations. We want to take this momentum through to the next phase of implementation of the SAMOA Pathway, to COP 25 in Chile and beyond. This is all about human beings and us doing our part in giving hope.

I look forward to working together with all of you to strengthen the global partnerships towards accelerating the renewable energy uptake in SIDS.

Thank you.