

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

REMARKS AT OPENING PLENARY OF THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

Apia, 1 September 2014

Your Excellency Mr. Tuilaepa [Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi], Prime Minister of Samoa,  
Your Excellency Mr. Baron Waqa, President of the Republic of Nauru and Chair of the Alliance  
of Small Island States,

Your Excellency Mr. John Ashe, President of the General Assembly,

[Your Excellency Mr. Martin Sajdik, President of the Economic and Social Council,]

[Mr. Wu Hongbo, Secretary-General of the Third International Conference on Small Island  
Developing States and United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social  
Affairs,]

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here in this beautiful country.

I thank the government and people of Samoa for their hospitality, and for hosting this important  
Conference in the International Year for Small Island Developing States.

Prime Minister Tuilaepa is an ardent and effective advocate for SIDS.

I would also like to acknowledge the President of the General Assembly, Mr. John Ashe –  
another SIDS leader – for his sound advice on these issues.

The diverse coalition of small island nations we call SIDS lives on the front lines of climate  
change and sustainable development.

They are also in the vanguard in pioneering solutions that the entire world needs.

The slogan for this conference is Island Voices, Global Choices.

Let us heed those voices.

Island issues affect us all.

I see SIDS as a magnifying glass.

When we look through the SIDS lens we see the vulnerabilities we all face.

And by addressing the issues facing SIDS we are developing the tools we need to promote sustainable development across the entire world.

Effective waste management and renewable energy; ocean stewardship and disaster resilience; improved connectivity and climate-smart agriculture...

These issues lie at the heart of sustainable development.

Twenty years ago, in Barbados, Governments made a global commitment to the sustainable development of SIDS. This bond was strengthened in Mauritius in 2005.

Now we have the SAMOA Pathway to guide us.

And we have partners.

I commend the commitment of the SIDS leaders who have gathered today.

I thank the government delegations from around the world for your support for SIDS.

And I welcome the representatives of major groups, the private sector and other stakeholders whose participation is essential for a sustainable future.

Excellencies,

The Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development noted with concern that SIDS have made less progress in development than other countries.

Some have even regressed.

So our first priority must be to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Second, we need a post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals that address the vulnerabilities and needs of SIDS.

Third, we need a meaningful legal global climate agreement by the end of next year.

The costly effects of climate change are evident everywhere, but nowhere more so than in SIDS.

Weather events are becoming more extreme, rainfall patterns are changing, coral reefs are dying and sea levels are rising.

Two years ago I visited the Solomon Islands and Kiribati.

In the Solomon Islands, a small town on Taro Island is planning to relocate its entire population.

The people of Kiribati face the same prospect.

I spoke to a young boy there who told me he was afraid to sleep at night for fear of being inundated by the sea.

Just yesterday, here in Samoa, I visited the village of Si'upapa. The whole area used to be agricultural. But after the tsunami in 2009, communities fled there. They are scared to return to the coast because they cannot predict the next disaster.

I could understand why when I drove by. We passed a school that lost all of its walls when the fierce waves hit. Now the building is just a shell. The tsunami struck early in the morning so children were not in class. But it was frightening to imagine how much worse it could have been if they were there.

The plight of millions of people in small island development States demands an international response.

By failing to act, we condemn the most vulnerable to unacceptable disruption to their lives as a result of the actions of those a world away.

In the worst cases – as we have seen in Africa – that means drought, famine and death.

I am very concerned that the world is not on track to keep global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius.

We need to transform our unsustainable consumption and production patterns and our business-as-usual mind-set.

I am convening a Climate Summit on 23 September at UN Headquarters in New York to catalyse action, build momentum for a climate agreement in Paris and shape a collective vision to tackle climate change.

I am asking leaders from Government, business, finance and civil society to come to New York with bold announcements and initiatives that will make the difference we know we need.

SIDS will have an important role.

You can tell the largest emitters what action you expect from them.

You can show how you are working to build resilience and create the green economies of the future.

You can set an example for the world.

I look forward to seeing you in New York and hearing your voices loud and clear.

Excellencies,

Combatting climate change, promoting sustainable development and addressing the vulnerabilities of SIDS will demand partnership, capacity and leadership.

The SAMOA Pathway provides a road that we must travel together.

The United Nations will continue to travel with you in this essential journey.

The UN system -- in all its diversity and with all its technical expertise -- will remain your reliable partner as we work together for the sustainable development of SIDS and a life of dignity for all.

Thank you.

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