



National Statement

PRIME MINISTER OF TUVALU

Honourable Mr. Kausea Natano

at

The 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

General Debate

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New York

UNGA77 Theme:

“A Watershed Moment: Transformative solutions to Inter-locking Challenges”

Introduction

Mr. President, Distinguished members of the General Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1 On behalf of the Government of Tuvalu, I congratulate you on your election as President of the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Tuvalu has full confidence in your leadership. Let me also take this opportunity to thank the president of our 76th session, Hon. Minister Abdulla Shahid, for a very successful session under his leadership, despite the challenges due to the covid19 pandemic.

Theme of UNGA77: “A watershed moment: transformative solution to interlocking challenges”.

Mr. President

2 We welcome the pragmatic vision of your presidency of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly. We applaud you for the theme of your presidency: “A watershed moment: transformative solutions to interlocking challenges.” Indeed, we must strengthen our commitment to upholding the core principles of the UN Charter at this watershed moment. We maintained that the UN Charter is our shared Constitutive Instrument to maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations, and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights.

3 We are indeed encouraged by the priorities of your presidency, and we look forward to working closely with you as we continue to grapple with economic recovery from the covid 19 pandemic, tackle climate change, and strive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. President

4 Global crises have become more complex, interlinked, and transboundary in their impacts, demanding global cooperation and solidarity to formulate and implement sustainable solutions. It requires all the partnerships we need to bring about positive changes to people's lives.

It is however regrettable that the Republic of China (Taiwan), with its notable partnerships on a wide range of development issues, continues to be kept out of the United Nations system. Tuvalu has significantly benefitted from our partnerships in agriculture, food security, public health, medicine, clean energy, including our recovery from the economic and social impacts of the Covid19 pandemic.

5 Tuvalu strongly supports the readmission of the Republic of China (Taiwan) into the UN as a founding member of the United Nations, and its active participation in UN specialized agencies including the World Health Organization, the International Civil Aviation Organization, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We must not sideline Taiwan, a vibrant democracy that has made significant progress on all the Sustainable Development Goals, and ready to contribute more to global efforts in achieving the SDGs.

6 It is also regrettable that the people of Cuba continued to face the economic burden of the long unilateral economic blockade. The economic blockade neglected the human rights and the spirit of cooperation espoused in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Keeping these measures in place deprived Cuba of the international development assistance and partnerships to recover and build back better.

Mr. President

7 In the same vein, we reiterated the strong concerns of our region of the potential threat of nuclear contamination to the health and security of the Blue Pacific, its people and prospects, and reaffirmed the importance of ensuring international consultations, international law, and independent and verifiable scientific assessments. These principles must govern the deployment and use of nuclear technology, and the discharge of nuclear materials and wastes into our Blue Pacific Continent.

8 We maintained that the UN decolonization process is critical to the protection of human rights including the right to self-determination and urge the meaningful engagement of the UN with all relevant partners and stakeholders to the decolonization process.

Mr. President

9 Let me now speak of an issue that is of the greatest concern to my country. Climate change and its consequential sea level rise, remains the single greatest existential threat my country faces, underscoring the urgency to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees through rapid, deep, and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

10 At an average land elevation of no more than 2 meters above sea level, my country will succumb to sea level rise. The IPCC report issued last year is clear, that at current global warming trend, we are destined to miss the 1.5 degrees target of the Paris Agreement. This clearly means that Tuvalu will be totally submerged within this century.

Mr. President

11 The climate crisis is creating an increasingly uncertain future for people in most parts of the world. Paradoxically in my region, the Pacific, it is making our future increasingly certain: but not in a way that gives us any kind of comfort.

12 During this century, several Pacific Island nations will become mostly uninhabitable. For my country Tuvalu, which sits halfway between Hawaii and Australia, this could happen in the next two to three decades. Other Pacific Island countries on the climate change frontline may have a few decades longer; but our final destination is no longer a matter of guesswork. Most societies see climate change as mainly about cutting carbon emissions or mitigating future impacts. We are facing a looming situation far

more profound - the near certainty of terminal inundation. Our peoples, in my generation or the next, will be unable to exist on the islands that have nurtured our ancestors for centuries – it is our God-given home.

Mr. President

13 Tuvalu and our Pacific neighbours have done nothing to cause climate change. Carbon emissions combined across the entirety of Pacific Islands amount to less than 0.03% of the world’s total – even less if we speak of historical emissions. The existential threat we face is not of our making. But it will remake us.

14 How we will negotiate this remaking is a question that the international community must now urgently begin to address. Major economies which have the highest contribution to greenhouse gas emission cannot be oblivious and do nothing.

15 People everywhere, across all ages and walks of life, are demanding leadership on climate change, especially from those most able to provide it. Tuvalu is an acid test of leadership: because if the international community allows an entire country to disappear from climate change, what hope will be possible for anyone else?

Mr. President

16 These are unprecedented times. Science cannot tell us exactly when our homeland will become uninhabitable. But it does tell us how. As the ocean rises, salt water permeates into the aquifers that provide our drinking water. Now, in many places, our water security is severely compromised. A rising ocean brings higher tides, and with increasing storm frequency and intensity, our villages, and agriculture are devastated. Flooding leaves soil saline, reducing crop yields, severely compromising our food security.

Infrastructure such as homes, roads, and power lines are washed away; and higher land on which to rebuild does not exist.

Mr. President

17 The precious coral that supports our tourism and nurtures our fish-stock perish, as the ocean warms and acidifies. The cost of eking out an existence, of maintaining the status quo, increases for individuals and the entire country, over time becoming too much to bear. Such extremities push citizens to leave; the nation itself becomes increasingly inchoate, legally, and spiritually rooted to a shoreline that is disappearing under rising tides.

18 This is how a Pacific atoll dies. This is how our islands will cease to exist. This is not about some future scenario. It is what we are living with now!

Mr. President

19 Inaction brings responsibilities. Tuvalu have not yet reached the end of this process of salination, destruction, degradation, and demise. But we are well past the beginning. Despite international agreements and repeated commitments, global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, with many countries still pursuing a future fueled by coal, oil, and gas.

20 This is the first time in history that the collective action of many nations – or more accurately, the collective inaction of many nations will be responsible for making sovereign countries uninhabitable. It is an unprecedented crisis requiring radical intervention.

Mr. President

21 Current international instruments such as the Convention on Statelessness do not cover our situation. Neither does the United Nations' various efforts to address climate change. Agreements reached at its annual summits, including last year's COP26 in Glasgow, cover a wide range of issues like targets for cutting emissions or commitments for international finance to address impacts. But with regard the looming uninhabitability of sovereign states, they say NOTHING.

Mr. President

22 This is why Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands launched the **Rising Nations Initiative** yesterday to fill the current gaps in awareness, legal framework and political commitment. The global community must begin a serious and responsible dialogue that acknowledges both the realities and the rights of Pacific Island nations such as mine, and more fundamentally, of our citizens.

Mr. President

23 This is about Sovereignty, Dignity, and Integrity.

We need a global settlement that guarantees nation states such as Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands a permanent existence beyond the inhabitable lifetime of our atoll homes, irrespective of the onslaught of climate change and sea level rise. It must recognize and protect our cultural integrity, our human and economic capital, and our sovereignty. It must be co-created and enacted with the peoples and governments of Island nations, not visited upon us by others.

Mr. President

24 This settlement includes, ultimately, the protection of our rights to our land and ocean, preserve our heritage, and sovereign right to govern our citizens. our relocation elsewhere in the world where our peoples will be welcome and celebrated. We do not seek to move out of our homeland. We seek fair and amicable treatment of displaced people so we do not become a burden on others; but equally, natural justice dictates that we are not fobbed off with a wasteland. Economically, we can continue to support ourselves – in the case of Tuvalu, for example, using income from the continued sustainable use of the Exclusive Economic Zone around our islands.

25 Finding the right solution will require statesmanship and empathy, beginning with an acknowledgement that a situation globally caused must also have a globally just and equitable solution.

Mr. President

26 As Pacific peoples, we raise our children to respect the ocean, land, and sky, as providers of life.

Now, through no fault of our own, we will soon have to abandon the oceans, land, and sky that have forged our cultures and identities for centuries. We neither castigate nor demand charity. But we do ask for generosity of spirit, support, and justice that recognizes our reality and our grave concern on the potential eradication of our atoll nations due to rising sea levels in our part of the world

27 I thank you for your attention.

TUVALU MO TE ATUA