

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF SAMOA HON FIAME NAOMI MATAAFA AT  
THE 78th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, NEW YORK,  
Saturday 23 September 2023.

Mr President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

Samoa extends congratulations and best wishes to His Excellency, Mr. Dennis Francis on the assumption of the Presidency of the 78th Session of the General Assembly. We are delighted to see Trinidad and Tobago, a sister small island developing state, at the helm of our organization for the next twelve months.

You have Samoa's full support in the successful execution of your mandate. It is an honour to address this Assembly on behalf of the Government and people of Samoa. We remain steadfast in our support of this multilateral institution and recognize that international cooperation is essential to fight for a just, more sustainable, and peaceful future for our people and planet. Whilst many global challenges remain, it is our hope that in the spirit of global solidarity and unity, we can address with urgency the threats of the climate crisis; the accelerated loss of biodiversity; the erosion of human rights and human health, worsening conflicts; the abuse of information and new technologies and garnering the political will to strengthen our collectivism towards sustainable development.

The theme for this year's General Assembly, speaks to our priorities and helps to frame our continued engagement with our United Nations family.

Excellencies,

The effects of climate change are etching a deepening and more devastating impact on our lives. The first half of 2023 was characterized by record temperatures in many regions of the world, intense-water temperatures in various ocean basins, droughts in parts of Africa, Europe and Asia, severe flooding as well as cyclones and devastating wildfires in Greece, northeastern Canada, and Hawaii decimating lives and livelihoods to ash and barren landscapes.

I extend Samoa's deep condolences to the people of Lahaina Maui, families and friends who have been lost in one of the worst wildfires to have ever affected a Pacific Island community. Indeed, our sympathies go out to all those affected by these devastating disasters. But our sympathies will only take us so far, and we will continually face these ever-worsening disasters if we continue to deny addressing their root causes. Scientists have warned of imminent; more frequent and many more extreme weather events, resulting in more lives lost and costlier, less resilient infrastructure.

Excellencies,

June 2023 is remembered for the warmest ever recorded global average temperatures up by more than 1.2°C compared to pre-industrial levels. Efforts to reduce global emissions such as investing in clean and affordable energy; moving towards green resilient economies; tackling deforestation; reducing the reliance on fossil fuels and protecting nature must be everyone's priority for the sake of humanity.

Targeted solutions must be complemented by ensuring climate finance for frontline countries and utilizing the best available science and technology. Our expectations for the upcoming COP28 in the UAE include crystallized commitments to bring about our envisioned 'reality. In particular, we wish to highlight the importance of operationalizing the Loss and Damage Fund as quickly as possible. For all AOSIS members, maintaining global temperatures below 1.5 degrees C is a point of no return.

Crossing this threshold spells the end of many of our island societies. We view the climate crisis as an intersecting one, causing damage to the wider environment such as the biodiversity that forms the web of life we depend on, for our livelihoods and economic growth. More than 1 billion people rely on forests for their livelihoods and land and the ocean absorb more than half of all carbon emissions.

The climate problem is worsening as the world's natural carbon sinks such as our oceans and rainforests cease to spawn life. Samoa as a core member of the SIDS Coalition for Nature, joins the crescendo of voices for the better protection of our biodiversity.

Excellencies,

The ocean is a vital resource for food and livelihoods and hence requires responsible stewardship that is integral in maintaining our Pacific identity, as the ocean is in us and we are the ocean. A healthy ocean will help in our fight against climate change. As the Blue Pacific continent, we must ensure that our oceans can still provide for us as we sustainably manage our marine resources, ecosystems and biodiversity. We urge our member states to assist in combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in our region which deprives our small island developing states of much needed revenue in a time of increased fiscal stress.

We believe in the interconnectedness of our responsibilities to our people and planet as reflected in the collective stewardship of our ocean and the goodwill that resulted in the adoption of the new treaty protecting biodiversity on the high seas. This is an important milestone in the path to sustainably managing the high seas and our oceans resources. Let us all sign the treaty for a timely ratification.

Similarly, we are engaged in the ongoing negotiations on a treaty to end plastic pollution. The need to address the global plastic pollution problem, especially in the marine environment, is a priority as this is a threat to our ecosystems and health.

Excellencies,

Non-communicable diseases are a priority area for Samoa and our blue Pacific continent. Currently, chronic NCDs are overtaking communicable diseases as the dominant health problem, and are the leading causes of mortality, morbidity and disability. At the national level – NCDs account for almost half of the deaths; premature deaths in fact, in Samoa. We have one of the highest obesity rates, particularly among children. Current data however shows some positive trends in the falling prevalence rates of alcohol drinkers and smokers and an increase in the prevalence of people who are physically active. These statistics are a catalyst for programs to promote healthier lifestyles.

The Government of Samoa has made people-centered health services and NCD control a priority in its Pathway for the development of Samoa 2019- 2025 and has also issued the National NCD Policy 2019-2023. With support from its development partners, the Samoa government launched a comprehensive program in May 2020, with the aim to build people centered and systematic NCD service provision to strengthen primary health care, empower communities promote early detection and effective referral of NCDs and increase population awareness of NCD risk factors.

Samoa remains committed to the global fight against NCDs through scaled up capacity building of all stakeholders, quality assured data collection and statistics for informed and forward-looking policy decisions as well as strategic partnerships to mobilize resources and support.

To help address the rising burden of non-Communicable diseases, we believe that access to a balanced and nutritional diet is a national priority. It is important to return to locally produced quality fresh foods with less reliance on processed imported foods. Nutrition and exercise in combination

with other lifestyle changes will do more to curb NCDs but these efforts must be enhanced by financial support for advocacy and capacity building of our health and education professionals.

We learned from the COVID pandemic experience that in the event of a global crisis, supply chain issues will disproportionately affect Small Island States in favour of larger markets. We targeted measures to enable self-reliance in terms of food production and responsible consumption and the promotion of local food systems. In this area we relied on support from our partner agencies such as the FAO particularly in the promotion of transformative food systems.

Excellencies,

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face a unique set of vulnerabilities which impede their ability to achieve sustainable development. Most SIDS including Samoa face high indebtedness which is compounded every time there is rebuilding after a natural disaster. And we know that natural disasters will increase in frequency and severity as long as climate change remains unaddressed. A multi-dimensional vulnerability index therefore will allow for the inclusion of more than just income-based criteria to assess eligibility for concessional finance. We are appreciative of the fact that the MVI is a tool that aims to create a richer lens on vulnerability and as SIDS we look forward to early endorsement and implementation of the MVI.

Excellencies,

We believe that there are a great many opportunities which arise from an increasingly digitized world, especially in connecting our people in remote areas. We do need to take better care of our citizens from the very real threats from cyber fraud and cyber-attacks. We need assistance in ensuring that our infrastructure and financial institutions are safeguarded against cyber threats and that we can build our capacity to address and combat these threats. In this regard we are mindful of the ongoing work of the “Open-ended Working Group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies” (2021-2025) which will report to the Assembly in 2025.

Excellencies,

We remain concerned that the war in Ukraine is still ongoing with no resolution in sight. We hope for a future of world peace, free from conflict, high-tech cyber and electronic crimes, social media abuse and online child sexual exploitation, and threats of terrorism in any form. For a small island developing nation like Samoa, we rely on the collective responsibility of the global community to achieve this through international cooperation, compliance with international law, diplomacy and with the UN Charter as our guide.

Excellencies,

We live in a highly contested region that is attracting intensified geostrategic interest. For small island countries in the Pacific like Samoa, security is more than geostrategic power. An expanded definition of security for the region reflects our desire to nuance our priorities and the demand for climate resilient and environmentally conscious infrastructure rather than simply viewing them through a lens of strategic competition. In this way can we ensure living in peace.

As a small nation with no military force, we continue to highlight the importance of multilateral platforms and the UN in conflict resolution and governance. We believe in the rule of law, and we hope that respect for this principle guides us through the types of conflicts we see today. International cooperation is needed now more than ever. Building resilience at the national level can only take us so far.

Samoa is confident that despite all the challenges, even existential threats for some of us; there is still hope if there is unity amongst our UN family. We have a moral obligation to change our world for the better and leave hope for our future generations.

In closing, let me reaffirm Samoa's commitment to the United Nations and our conviction that it remains the foremost forum to address all issues that transcend national boundaries. We reiterate our call to the United Nations through its multiplicity of agencies to better understand our unique cultures, respect our diversity and embrace our differences to help build the future we want through mutual and sustainable partnerships. ENDS