

**Hon. Hu'akavameiliku  
Prime Minister of Tonga  
National statement  
4th International Conference on Small Islands Developing States, SIDS4**

**'Charting the course toward Resilient Prosperity'.**

Distinguished Co-Chairs

Excellencies and Esteemed Delegates

We come to you from the Kingdom of Tonga. We are a small island nation exposed to the frontlines of climate change. We face a crisis this crisis due largely to inaction for too long will be felt by all nations.

We stand here not just for Tonga. We stand here for all small island nations and future generations.



Our statement is aligned with those delivered by Vanuatu on behalf of the Pacific SIDS, Cook Islands on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Samoa on behalf of AOSIS, and Uganda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

This Fourth International Conference on SIDS (SIDS4), hosted by the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, bears hope as promulgated in the first decennial United Nations conference on SIDS in 1994 and subsequent ones.

The Kingdom of Tonga extends our congratulations to the Government of Antigua and

Barbuda for hosting SIDS4 despite the challenging circumstances. We are grateful for the kind hospitality you have shown us.

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Allow me to acknowledge and applaud the efforts made under your competent guidance in successfully concluding the Preparatory Committee. I also thank the dedicated experts and the Secretariat's team.

We also thank Member States, specifically our development partners, for their part of the work so that we now can have the new SIDS development programme of action - the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS).

This can only strengthen our initiatives in implementing the globally recognized sustainable development priorities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) which has really build on the Barbados Programme of Action (PPOA), the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation (MSI), and the SAMOA Pathway.

SIDS continue to be a somewhat unique and complex situation in terms of sustainable development. We live with unique vulnerabilities such as being remote, small, fragmented, surrounded by vast ocean spaces and being acutely vulnerable to climate change.

Indeed, we, our people are highly exposed to the multifaceted challenges presented by the ever more escalating impacts of climate change and high levels of debt.

The small size of our economies brings with it that global events have disproportionate impacts on us. Just take the last several years disruption of supply chains. With the cost of imported goods ever rising, with energy costs spiraling, and it all triggering growing inflation, more and more families are pushed into poverty.

Our coastlines are at high risk with continuously rising sea levels. Extreme weather events are ever more frequent. In turn, this destroys costly infrastructure and precious agricultural lands are ruined by saltwater intrusion.

This is the reality of day-to-day of our island nation and people and the reality of all other SIDS.

We in Tonga, and across the Pacific, will not passively wait for more disasters to strike us.

We all know that the impacts of climate change disproportionately burden the most vulnerable members of our societies, particularly women, youth, elderly and those living in poverty.

We are committed to ensuring that climate solutions must address these social vulnerabilities. They must be inclusive and empower all members of our communities to build resilience.

In my role as the Pacific Islands Forum Climate Finance Champion, I have championed the regional funding facility – the Pacific Resilient Facility (PRF) and the Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity.

The PRF facility will specifically target adaptation measures to strengthen our resilience

to climate shocks. The Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity (UBPP) is being developed to address the challenges and opportunities facing our vast ocean territories. This fund would focus on sustainable ocean management, access to finance for ocean-based industries, and fostering a Blue Economy.

Co--Chairs, Chairs,

Climate change is indeed the biggest threat to our Blue Pacific.

We know the risks to both the environment and the economy. In our efforts and those of our partners, it is important to protect rights, privileges, and responsibilities outlined in international law, particularly in relation to rising sea levels caused by climate change.

We support the Chair of PSIDS in urging the world to take immediate and intensified action to combat climate change. This should include substantial funding for both adaptation and mitigation, considering the unique challenges faced by Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and their vulnerability to climate impacts. Tonga and other small island developing states need increased and expeditious access to concessional finance to support our development efforts and enhance our ability to withstand external shocks. Tonga fully supports the review of the International Financial architecture.

With the responsibility and stewardship over nearly one third of the world's ocean, SIDS have a significant role and responsibility in preserving our ocean.

These zones are a fundamental part of the Earth's ecosystem. They are both an essential part of and a driver for sustainable development.

This implies that SIDS have a great responsibility to maintain the health, productivity, and resilience of the oceans and coasts. The pursuit of sustainable practices in fisheries, aquaculture, mariculture, marine and coastal tourism, and development and use of ocean-based renewable energy are key towards developing sustainable ocean-based economies. Such pursuit is crucial to the well-being, traditions, and sense of self of our communities.

One of our key priorities should be the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI). The index is a practical instrument for acquiring a more thorough understanding of vulnerability. We need a tool that can provide meaningful and effective assistance where and when needed.

We call for the adoption of the MVI and its operationalization.

Furthermore, establishing a regional funding mechanism alongside instruments like the MVI can streamline access to critical financing for SIDS priorities. Such mechanism could harness the combined resources and expertise of our Pacific Island nations. It would contribute to ensuring the efficient allocation of funds towards adaptation, mitigation, and ocean-based development.

We also call for concrete steps to establish a timeframe for operationalizing the MVI and develop clear criteria for SIDS access to financing. Such comprehensive approach would ensure that the most vulnerable receive the support they urgently need.

Co--Chairs,Chairs,

While we have made considerable progress, hurdles remain and new challenges confront us. Action is demanded.

Inequalities resulting from trade imbalances are magnified when vulnerability such as we experience is present. We have therefore prioritized trade and investment, striving to boost economic diversification by improving trade regulations.

Tonga, as host of the Pacific Forum Leaders Meeting this year, will play a key role in advancing regional priorities on climate change, ocean health, and social development. We are fully committed to ensure that the voices of the Pacific, particularly those of women, youth, and vulnerable communities, are heard and addressed in these discussions. Furthermore, we believe that sustainable development can only be achieved by investing in the education and skills development of our youth, and by promoting gender equality and the empowerment of all women.

Co--Chairs,Chairs,

Our commitment is to the collective wisdom of our Small Island Developing States as we strive to create strong economies through trade, investment, and ocean-based activities. We aim to ensure the safety and prosperity of our societies, prioritize urgent climate action, and safeguard our environment. A genuine partnership but also appropriate methods and tools to evaluate our progress are vital in successfully implementing ABAS with the goal to achieve sustainable and resilient prosperity in the next 10 years.

The future of our islands, and the health of our planet, depend on immediate and decisive action.

We urge all nations to join us in building a resilient future for all.

I look forward to a productive week ahead.

Thank you.-