

**Statement by the Hon Hu'akavameiliku
PM of Tonga
SIDS4 Global Children and Youth Action Summit
Sunday 26th May 2024
University of the West Indies
Five Islands Campus**

Hon Gaston Browne, PM of Antigua and Barbuda
Hon Fiame Mata'afa, PM of Samoa, Chair of AOSIS
Co-organisers the SIDS Global Children and youth Action summit, UNICEF and the
Ashley Lashley foundation of Barbados
Hon Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, and most importantly, our Youth of
Today.



I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today. I think all of us acknowledge that we are at a crossing, at a critical juncture in our shared efforts to build a future of inclusivity, sustainability, and prosperity.

Today, we are not just here as representatives of our nations. We are here with the responsibility to protect and further this shared vision of prioritizing the well-being of our children and young people.

As the PM of Tonga, I represent the hopes and dreams of our nation's youth. We know they are the foundation for our future.

The Kingdom of Tonga, like many SIDS, faces unique challenges.

Yet, any challenge also bears opportunity. I see great potential for progress, creativity, and change.

It now is our shared responsibility to seize these opportunities in order to improve the lives of our young people.

Today I restate Tonga's unwavering promise to support our young population. Our dedication goes beyond mere words. It is a commitment backed by real actions and tangible efforts.

We acknowledge that the future of our nation, and even the world, relies on empowering, educating and involving our young generation. The foundation of our commitment is embedded in and through education. Tonga is currently undertaking education reforms, including a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math subjects to prepare our youth for success in the 21st century. We have introduced a digital literacy program to ensure every student graduates with the ability to thrive and work effectively in a digital world.

We are investing in digital infrastructure to ensure that every child, regardless of their geographic location, has access to quality education.

We are also giving high importance to vocational training to equip our young people with the skills they need for various job opportunities on the increasingly global market.

Education is important but it is not the sole factor. To really benefit from education, it is important to guarantee good health and proper nutrition to our youth. Tonga is taking proactive measures to address the urgent issue of Non-Communicable Diseases, by implementing country wide health campaigns and community-led initiatives.

Our objective is to promote the development of healthy lifestyle habits and ensure that our youth have sufficient and affordable availability of nutritious food. Our objective is to be holistic in and for the development of young individuals, encompassing their physical, mental and emotional growth.

Our goal is to encourage an atmosphere fostering a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship among our young men and women. We believe that by nurturing the creativity and ingenuity of our young people, we can drive sustainable economic growth and create new opportunities for all.

Needless to say, climate change remains one of the most pressing challenges for SIDS. It is our youth who will bear the brunt of its impact. In Tonga we are taking bold steps to

build climate resilience and promote environmental sustainability. We are engaging our young people in climate action through education, advocacy, and community projects. We are also working to amplify their voices on the global stage, ensuring that their perspectives are heard, and their contributions recognised.

As I stand before you today, I am proud to announce that Tonga will bring these commitments not only to our national level—we will advocate for a regional commitment to action—a call that aligns with our shared goals of youth empowerment, education, health, innovation and climate resilience. We believe that only by working together can we create a brighter future for all our young people. Youth are more than just the leaders of tomorrow; they are already leaders today.

They have the power to contribute to shaping our collective destiny and it is our duty to support and empower them in every way possible.

As we write our pledges on this wall of commitments, let us do so with the knowledge that our actions today will define the world of tomorrow.

To our young people I say this, You are the heart and soul of our nations.

Your dreams, your aspirations, and your voices matter.

We stand with you, and we are committed to building a future where you thrive, where all thrive and succeed and lead with confidence.

Thank you. –ENDS