



**ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
GENERAL DEBATE  
AT THE  
SIXTY FOURTH SESSION  
OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**STATEMENT BY  
THE HON. DR. FELETI VAKA'UTA SEVELE  
PRIME MINISTER OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA**

**SATURDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2009  
NEW YORK**

*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Like previous speakers before me, I too, offer you Mr. President my warmest congratulations upon your election to the Presidency of the General Assembly for this session.

I wish to thank our tireless Secretary General for his excellent report on the work of the Organisation and his continuing leadership during these unprecedented and challenging times. A testament to the Secretary General's leadership has been his persistent pursuit to convene the Summit on Climate Change earlier this week. For those of us who are also members of the Alliance of Small Island States our own Summit immediately prior was a timely exercise to galvanise the critical issues at stake in the lead up to Copenhagen in December.

Climate change has taken its rightful place at the forefront of many of the statements we have heard so far this week. For Small Island Developing States like Tonga we all need to reach beyond our narrow national interests and embrace our collective responsibility to each other as nation states and to those States most vulnerable and least able to address the vagaries of climate change. At the Pacific Islands Forum, the issue of climate change and the type of collective effort required has been at the forefront of meetings by Pacific Leaders, most recently in Cairns under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Rudd of Australia. Such an effort resulted, earlier this year, in the adoption by consensus by the General Assembly of a resolution on climate change and its security implications.

It was heartening to hear in this chamber words of action; a determination to move from the rhetoric of climate change to the reality of action. Action to mitigate the effects of climate change and action to stop the waste of our energy resources.

But the words of Presidents and Prime Ministers are not enough. They must be matched by action. Our determination and our understanding of the truth of climate change must be moved by the honest action to mitigate and change the wasteful energy habits of a lifetime into the productive energy habits of the future.

The lessons of the past year have reinforced our support for the reform of international financial governance institutions. In particular, we look to the outcome of the meeting of the G20 in Pittsburgh as further crucial and concerted action, following in the wake of those measures taken in Washington and London.

Despite the uncertain global economic and financial climate, we remain committed to making further progress on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which remains a core component of our national development planning. Much of that progress has been reliant on our own domestic efforts, but has been complemented by our development partners. In this regard, we support the Secretary General's convening of a Special Summit on the MDGs in 2010 as a final push towards 2015. Further the High Level Review of Mauritius Strategy of Implementation in the same year offers Small Island Developing States, such as Tonga, a fresh opportunity to take stock of progress and areas for improvement. We welcome as well the renewed interest and engagement of the United States of America in the Pacific Islands.

Earlier this year, Tonga, in compliance with its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, lodged a partial submission for the consideration by the Commission on the Outer Limits of the Continental Shelf. This was a significant exercise made possible through our own efforts with the technical assistance of organizations such as the Commonwealth Secretariat and regional organizations as well as development partners. As an island nation, the living and the potential of non-living marine resources of our maritime zones remain critical to our future. We look forward to working constructively with the Commission at the appropriate time on this matter.

We continue to follow the meandering course of the discussions on the reform of the Security Council. We maintain our support for its reform and the view that there should be an expansion in both categories of permanent and non-permanent membership.

Since 100% of our power generation is fuelled by imported fossil fuels, our economic potential has been adversely affected by rising fuel prices, forcing us to investigate feasible renewable sources of energy. We have set a target to achieve 50% of our electricity generation utilising renewable energy sources by 2012.

We reviewed donor funding, provided by our development partners to see how best we could achieve this ambitious goal, and our wish to also reduce green house gas emissions. At the conclusion of the Regional Pacific Energy Ministers Meeting earlier this year, we discussed these issues with our Development Partners; it became apparent very quickly that a new model of doing business was needed. And so it was that that the concept for The Tonga Renewable Energy Road Map was borne.

The Development Partners all agreed to collaborate under the coordination of the World Bank to assess the current infrastructure of on-grid and off-grid electrification throughout the Kingdom. The World Bank, The European Union, the European Investment Bank, the Asian Development Bank, Australian Aid, New Zealand Aid, and Japanese Aid readily accepted this opportunity to actively participate in the development of our Energy Road Map.

The Road Map will assess the most suitable renewable energy source utilising the rapid advances in technology, assess the infrastructure in which the electricity can be generated and distributed, and provide models of systems that can be implemented throughout remote islands to provide real electricity to those communities.

These efforts have been recently boosted by the strong support of the Government of the United Arab Emirates and The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), reconfirmed at bilateral meetings held this week here in New York.

Tonga's cultural and constitutional roots are innately enduring. We are proud of our 134 year-old written Constitution, one of the oldest in the world and still in force. Our Constitution enshrined basic human rights and freedoms which are, today, the subject of international treaties. The Tongan way of life is not solely based on the rights and responsibilities, freedoms and obligations of the individual, but emphasise rights, responsibilities, freedoms and obligations to the extended family and whole community. While the values underlying human rights may be worded differently than Tongan customary and traditional values, and both express similar aspirations, Tonga's strength lies in the binding links of collective group values and individual obligations.

Our Parliament recently considered ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Parliament voted not to ratify CEDAW because to do so would cut across our cultural and social heritage that make up our unique Tongan way of life.

We take the ratification of International Treaties very seriously. We did not want to ratify CEDAW as a matter of international convenience. We would rather be judged on our actions of empowerment of women than by a ratification of convenience. And we make no apologies for our stance. We admit that there are issues to be addressed. But rather than ratify CEDAW, we prefer to address those specific areas of concern for women in our own way. We maintain that our women are among the most highly cherished and respected in the world.

In closing, this month marks the tenth anniversary of Tonga's admission as a Member State of the United Nations. We reaffirm the rights and responsibilities bestowed upon us by the United Nations Charter and pledge to continue to participate constructively in addressing our common challenges. These challenges will be overcome by our action. Given that the United Nations is the forum for United Action, and the pledges made by Leaders to United Action, we may just awake to the fact that it is the good in the world and not the evil that surpasses all explanation.

-----