



TUVALU

Statement

Delivered by

PRIME MINISTER

Honourable Enele Sosene Sopoaga OBE

at the

**Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly
on
International Commission on Population and Development**

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Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates, and
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I join other delegates in congratulating you on your Chairmanship and we look forward to working with you in advancing the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

Chairman,

2. We welcome the report of the Secretary General entitle "Framework of Actions for the Follow up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014", as well as the Index Report on the interactive debate of the 47th session of the Commission on Population and Development. As we transition from the MDGs to the new global development framework of SDGs and the Post 2015 agenda - we are reminded always by our United Nations Charter that our populations - "we the people" - are not statistics and demographics, but men and women, boys and girls with human rights and aspirations for a better and brighter future. It is also equally important that it is us "we the leaders" and those of us in positions of authority and influence that must take charge to facilitate or make transformational decisions that will make this world a peaceful and prosperous one.

3. The Rio Declaration and the Agenda 21 call for a development pathway that recognizes the interrelationships between population, pace and quality of economic growth, patterns and levels of natural resource use and the state of the environment. In pursuing the future we need, we should not compromise the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. The global survey for the ICPD beyond 2014 show that, despite significant gains in poverty reduction and economic growth, many are still being marginalized or left behind, lacking fulfilment of basic needs, meaningful work, access to social protection, or public services in health or education. There are still significant barriers for many around the world to participate in the development process and enjoy their human rights.

4. In Tuvalu for example our intrinsic development constraints pertains to our small land area, small population, narrow natural resource endowments, low elevations from sea level, remoteness, diseconomies of scale and daunting trade barriers, acute exposure to global crisis and environmental disasters and limited adaptation capacity. These development constraints pose formidable challenges to our design of development programmes and budget allocations. We certainly do not need further human induced financial shocks or environmental challenges over and above our natural dose of constraints.

5. Nevertheless Tuvalu with the assistance of its development partners, have made significant achievements in key areas of population and development in primary education, child mortality and maternal health. Other significant progress have been gained in gender equality, HIV/ AIDS, and environment, whilst struggling to address poverty eradication.

These key elements and information have been mainstreamed into the recently published Population Policy and our National Roadmap and National Sustainable Development Plan – Te Kakeega II. We are forever grateful for these partnerships.

6. Given our small total land area (a third of Manhattans!), controlling net population growth is a priority. As the youth numbers increases, declining mortality levels and high fertility levels, greater attention is directed at the population dynamics and trends. Teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), family planning services remain key areas to be supported through national and regional partnerships. In partnership with the Tuvalu Family Health Association, the Ministry of Health is committed to promote the utilization of family planning services and comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health Services, especially for the young people and outer island population.

Chairman,

7. Funafuti, the capital is the only major township in Tuvalu and have been urbanizing since 1970s resulting in a high population density of over 57% of the citizens in 2014. This concentration and overwhelming preponderance has added tremendous pressure on the already fragile atoll environment of, compounding the pressure on water and food supply and waste management and disposal and subsequent sprawling of squatter settlements. In contrast the outer islands have youth and labour force deficits and an aging population. But urbanization can also be seen as both a symptom and a cause of youth unemployment and underemployment and which can inevitably impact on law and order, crime and social instability.

8. The main issues for **youth** in Tuvalu are the scarcity of employment opportunities, and the confined private sector and entrepreneurial prospects. The Government will continue to train its youth in the technical fields and seafaring to facilitate the marketability of Tuvalu tradesmen and seamen in the global market and international shipping respectively. Recently, sea faring opportunities have been greatly affected by the global financial crisis and the Government has committed to subsidising airfares for our seafarers in order to compete with other seafaring countries particularly in Asia. Temporary work schemes in the farming labour markets of neighbouring New Zealand and Australia have also generated decent work for young men and women and provide financial support for the families through remittances.

Chairman,

9. Tuvalu agrees on the focus on improving the quality of education, completion rates, and vocational training for all. Education is a key factor in sustainable development as an enabler for participation in development; for accessing knowledge and for coping with the complexities of the development nexus. There is almost a 100% enrolment rate in primary schools, and there are more girls than boys enrolled in secondary and tertiary education.

Recently, the Government has approved a 'sky is the limit' education policy, opening up an avenue for ambitious Tuvaluans to pursue postgraduate education.

10. More women are now in full time employment in both government and private sector in Tuvalu. In the public service, the employment ratio of female: male is approaching equality, especially in the middle to senior management positions. 20% of Permanent Secretaries are females, and currently there is one female member in the 15 member House of Parliament. In terms of self-employment, women are equally active as men. The empowerment of women and a stand-alone gender-Sustainable Development Goal in the Post 2015 framework will be fully supported by Tuvalu.

11. Under the Family Domestic Violence Bill, the Police Powers Act of 2009, and the National Gender Policy of 2014, the government of Tuvalu has **zero tolerance toward violence against women**. The Tuvalu National Council of Women has set up for the first time, a Women's Crisis Centre in support of women and children who suffer from domestic violence. The center also provides shelter and counseling services and works in partnership with the Tuvalu Police Department and the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Tuvalu Association of NGOs and Churches to prevent family disintegration and domestic violence.

Chairman,

12. As a society with strong traditional and cultural values, we strongly emphasize the importance of family culture in our societies as **the family unit** is and remains to be the foundation for economic and social resilience and sustainability. The Government has taken particular attention to family sensitive policies in housing, work opportunities, health and scholarships, particularly to the most vulnerable families of diverse forms and those in difficult life situations. We share the focus of ICPD in investing in individual human rights, capabilities and dignity, but we are of the view that these are best nurtured through strong noble family underpinnings. The alternatives is that of broken families, broken homes, communities and societies, thus creating another strain of poverty, that of poverty in morals.

13. **Non-Communicable Disease** is a serious health concern in the Pacific and also in Tuvalu. Around 70 percent of all deaths in the Pacific are caused by NCDs such as heart attacks, strokes, cancer, diabetes, respiratory diseases and related illnesses. These are fueled by risk factors such as tobacco use, unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity and alcohol abuse. Tuvalu is committed to combating this epidemic through its National Strategic Plan on NCDs 2011-2015, and in conjunction with the Pacific regional NCD Road map in improving preventive measures, by increasing taxation and regulatory control to reduce consumption of tobacco and alcohol, food and drinks high in fat, salt and/or sugar that leads to obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

Chairman

14. **Climate change will threaten the very survival and the future of Tuvaluans and many more millions around the world.** The solution to this challenge is beyond the capacity of any single nation but requires collective global action and sector-wide strategies. We must urgently address climate change in a legal and forward looking manner, otherwise our ICPD programme of action, our SDGs and Post 2015 agenda will be meaningless and many will be left behind. Tomorrow at the UN SGs Climate Change Summit, we should offer bold commitments to curbing GHG emissions and keep average temperature well below 1.5 degrees Celsius. We must step up and take concrete actions to reduce our emissions and support those populations that are vulnerable.

15. Tuvalu reaffirms its commitment to a forward looking agenda for the ICPD Beyond 2014 and to it being mainstreamed into the Post 2015 Development Agenda.

16. I thank You Chairman for giving me an audience.
