



THE PERMANENT MISSION OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT BY

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THE KINGDOM OF TONGA

AT THE

HIGH LEVEL PLENARY MEETING

60TH SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NEW YORK

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(Please Check Against Delivery)

Mr President,
Heads of State and Government,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

At the outset I take this opportunity to express Tonga's deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathy to the Government and people of the United States of America who have suffered loss in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast.

The historical Millennium Declaration adopted in 2000 set a number of specific and time bound goals with the universal vision of the Member States for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world, in which all human beings can live better and safer lives. We meet again here in New York to take stock of where we are and to review our overall achievements, highlight the issues and constraints, and to appraise the options available to us as a collective group in order to bring us back on track and to ensure that the specified targets that we as a global community set are met by 2015.

Mr President

We need to be constantly reminded as to why the goals are important, and Professor Sachs in his report on the Millennium Project aptly summarizes these manifold reasons as follows: For the international political system, they are the fulcrum on which development policy is based. For the billion plus people living in extreme poverty, they represent the means to a productive life. For everyone on Earth, they are the linchpin to the quest for a more secure and peaceful world.

What have we achieved over the last five years? At a global level although considerable progress has been made in achieving many of the goals, progress has been disproportionate across regions, and countries. Progress has also been disproportionate across the goals. At the same time, there have been many missed opportunities. The final score as we have been weighed on the scale is that we have been found wanting. But all is not lost, because we once again have this unique opportunity to once again pull together and renew our commitments to truly make a difference.

As far as my own country Tonga is concerned, we have achieved targets such as universal primary education and gender equality through the provision of free primary school education for children of ages 5 to 14 years as stipulated in our Constitution. Considerable improvements have also been achieved in secondary enrolment rates. Tonga's performance on the human development index and the Human Poverty Index reflects a high level of expenditure in health and education, stagnant population growth and sustained high levels of investment in the social sector. The UN Human Development Report 2005 ranked Tonga at 54 among 177 countries. However much still needs to be done in terms of further improvement in the quality and level of delivery of services, and this is currently being addressed by Government through a comprehensive health and education sector wide programme jointly financed by domestic resources, overseas development assistance and loan funds. The majority of the population has access to safe water and sanitation facilities in both rural and urban areas.

One of the areas where Tonga needs to make more progress is in the participation of women in decision-making both at the local and national level. The current level of women's participation is largely attributed to cultural overtones, and there are significant efforts to educate and promote the greater involvement of women in the political arena.

Mr President

Small Island Developing Countries, including Tonga, face many unique challenges because of our small populations, remoteness and disperse locations, narrow resource endowment and vulnerability to external shocks, including from international market fluctuations and natural disasters.

The development of regional and international alliances such as the Pacific Plan as well as the Mauritius Strategy adopted by the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in January 2005 play a crucial role in addressing these unique challenges in an environment subject to rapidly changing forces.

The Pacific Plan promotes three main approaches to regionalism: Firstly regional cooperation through intergovernmental dialogue and the sharing of experiences and the lessons learnt; secondly the regional provision of goods and services that can benefit from the pooling of national services at the regional level and thirdly regional integration through the lowering of market and technical barriers between countries.

Mr President

The continuing escalation in the price of oil and its consequent negative impact on our development efforts is of concern to us, and we therefore support accelerated efforts to research into alternative sources of energy.

Mr President

While we fully recognize that the national Governments should take responsibility for their development efforts, we are also cognizant of the fact that domestic financial resources on its own will not be sufficient to finance our respective country's development programmes. The Monterrey Consensus fully recognized that for a number of countries including Small Island Developing States, overseas development assistance is still the largest source of external financing and is critical for the achievement of the development goals and targets of the Millennium Declaration and other internationally agreed development targets.

Tonga therefore welcome the renewed commitment made by donor partners to meeting the target of 0.7% ODA of their Gross National Income (GNI) by 2015. We also welcome the UN Declaration on Innovative Sources of Financing for Development which provides mechanisms to increase and supplement traditional sources of finance.

But we also recognize that Overseas Development Assistance while necessary will not be sufficient, and will have to be complemented by Foreign Direct Investment, trade and development partnership.

Mr President

Tonga supports the proposal for a comprehensive package of reforms to revitalize the General Assembly as well as the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council in order to fulfill its mandate as envisaged by the charter. We also support the ongoing work of the Secretary General to continuously improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Secretariat.

On the issue of the reform of the Security Council, we support a Security Council that is more broadly representative of the international community as a whole and the geopolitical realities of today, and to expand its membership to meet these goals. In this regard, Tonga maintains its support of Japan's proper and permanent place on any enhanced Council.

Mr President

In conclusion, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 is still a reality, but it can only be made possible if all of the parties concerned fulfill their respective roles and obligations. Let us deliver on our promises and truly make a difference.

Thank you.