

At UN Assembly, small island States press for action to mitigate impacts of climate change

22 September 2017 – The President of Kiribati, Taneti Maamau, told the United Nations General Assembly that the theme of its current session – ‘Focusing on People’– reminded world leaders of their responsibility to ensure that human lives, dignity and values prevail over “dollar value.”

Indeed, the shared goal is to “provide a peaceful and secure world, without nuclear weapons, and to promote social progress, better living standards, human rights and dignity for all our citizens,” he told the annual general debate.

Offering condolences to those affected by the recent string of natural disasters in the Caribbean, United States and Mexico, and elsewhere, he stressed that while the plight Kiribati, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, the Maldives and other small island developing States may not capture global attention, those countries and their people continue to suffer daily from the impact of climate-driven disasters.

“The United Nations must focus on the most vulnerable and underprivileged members of our global family, such as the least developed countries and small island developing States,” emphasized Mr. Maamau. “We must make sure they are not left behind in our global journey towards achieving the global development Agenda [...] We must make sure their voices are heard,” he added.

Asserting that oceans have a strong connection to people, peace and prosperity, the President urged for the formulation of an international legally-binding instrument to manage the use of biological marine diversity beyond national jurisdiction. “We must ensure that urgent and collective action for conservation of our ocean is made so that we do not repeat the same mistake we made with our atmosphere,” he stressed.

Mr. Maamau pointed out that in the quest for sustainable development, the focus is often on economic fundamentals at the expense of human values. He urged compassion for the most vulnerable to transform the world’s challenges, saying “Love, compassion, respect, understanding and kindness are priceless solutions to the mounting problems that we continue to battle.”

[Full statement available here](#)



King Tupou VI of Tonga addresses the general debate of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly. UN Photo/Cia Pak

Also addressing the Assembly, King Tupou VI of Tonga shared his concerns over

the conservation and sustainable use of global resources, underscoring the importance of partnerships in collectively achieving the targets, goals and objectives stipulated under international law and internationally-agreed outcomes.

Turning to the 2017 High-Level Political Forum, he highlighted the value of reviewing the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), commending the initiative to examine the complex sustainability challenges facing small island developing States. The King of Tonga fully supported Fiji's Presidency of the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change this year, to strongly address the adverse impacts of climate change and the urgent need for innovation in adaptation for those island States, and called for the appointment of a UN Special Representative on Climate and Security.

"We have, and continue to, experience the negative impacts of ocean degradation to our livelihoods and culture due to the anthropogenic activities and inter-related devastating effects of climate change," he said.

To Tonga, the successful implementation of SDG 14 – on the ocean and its resources – is critical for the pathway towards sustainable development and its inter-connection with achieving other goals, such as those related to food security, water and sanitation, health, economic growth, and sustainable production and consumption.

He urged strong political will on mainstreaming ocean-related actions in international, regional and national development plans and strategies for the inclusive participation of all stakeholders. "We may be small islands [we are all] large ocean States," he stated.

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Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare of Solomon Islands addresses the general debate of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly. UN Photo/Cia Pak

Manasseh Sogavare, Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, spoke at length about the negative impacts of climate change, which are occurring at an alarming rate on its shores, as presenting a clear and present danger.

"For us Pacific Island nations, climate change continues to be our enemy [and] we are invaded by this enemy every day," he said.

He also condemned the recent testing of ballistic missiles by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea over the Pacific Ocean as an insult to the people of the Pacific. "We are ocean people. The sea is our sanctuary. It is the foundation of our heritage," he underscored, denouncing any pollution and contamination of that ocean, which its peoples depend on for their livelihoods.

The Prime Minister highlighted that an unstable climate, and the subsequent

displacement and relocation of people, can exacerbate some of the core drivers of conflict – such as migratory pressures, clash of cultures and competition for resources. “These are threats to the very existence of humanity and could very well morph into threats to global peace and security,” he said, adding that Pacific small island developing States have been requesting the Security Council to address the issue of climate change.

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