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Hon Minister of Health

Speech at the United Nations High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Session nine 12th July 2017

Subject: Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world: Taking forward the Samoa Pathway.

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) which was held in Apia, Samoa, from the 1st to the 4th September 2014, focused the world's attention on a group of countries that remain a special case for sustainable development due to their unique and particular vulnerabilities.

I had the privilege of hosting the SIDS side event on Health and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).

At this special side event, Samoa reaffirmed that the sustainable development of our nations is founded on the environment, health and well-being of our people. We noted that the current NCD epidemic in our Pacific countries remains a major constraint to development.

The burden of NCDs in the Pacific Islands is recognised as amongst the highest, especially in relation to the prevalence of NCDs and NCD risk factors

Recent studies have shown that between 60 to 80% of deaths are attributed to NCDs. The top 10 countries with the highest rates of overweight and obesity as well as diabetes are mostly from the Pacific region

At the SIDs a Pacific NCD Partnership was launched calling for a multi sector approach to prevent and control NCDs.

Since the 2014 SIDs in Samoa much work has been done in the Pacific Islands Countries in recognition of the increasing costs of NCDs.

In the inaugural Joint Forum Economic and Pacific Health Ministers Meeting held in Solomon Islands 2014, the Ministers approved the establishment of a Roadmap to develop and provide guidance towards minimising the NCDs risk factors in Pacific Islands Countries .

This Road Map highlights the four key actions all countries in the Pacific can take based on need, and 'best buys':

- **strengthening tobacco control;**
- **reducing consumption of unhealthy food and drink;**
- **improving the efficiency of the consumer health dollar;**
- **strengthening evidence based policies and decisions to ensure resources are used well**

At the 20th anniversary of the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting in 2015, the Ministers recommitted to the vision of Healthy Islands, as being places where:

- **children are nurtured in body and mind;**
- **environments invite learning and leisure;**
- **people work and age with dignity;**
- **ecological balance is a source of pride; and**
- **the ocean which sustains us is protected.¹**

The Ministers directed that a Healthy Islands Monitoring Framework be developed.

This Healthy Islands Monitoring Framework is now in draft and will be discussed and approved at the upcoming Pacific Health Ministers meeting in the Cook Islands in August next month.

Mr Chairman

Our countries have small and vulnerable economies.

The combination of increasing costs of NCDs, increasing health expenditure, already high proportion of spending by governments on health and slow economic growth does not bode well for the future.

A critical factor in health for Samoa and our Pacific neighbors is the double burden of disease caused by NCDs and communicable diseases, including, emerging and re-emerging diseases.

Mr Chairman

I would like to briefly share some of the strategies that we in Samoa are taking to address NCDs and NCD risk factors.

By the time the Liquor, Tobacco Control, and, the Food Legislations were passed in Parliament, we in health had created an environment of public awareness and support for the need of these laws to protect health and well being. The seeds sown early through targeted as well as national health promotion programs had grown into active public support for these laws.

A feasibility study on unhealthy foods completed in 2016 included a Nutrient Profiling Model framework requesting an increase of 20% tax on foods with high sugar, fat and salt content. The recommendations of this study have been endorsed by Cabinet. Preparations for implementation is in place.

Samoa is one of the 15 successful applicants to the Framework on the Convention of Tobacco Control (FCTC) 2030 Project with the objective to accelerate the implementation of the FCTC Treaty.

At the national level, Samoa is also amending the Tobacco law to require annual licensing of Tobacco industries and outlets.

Although much work with regard to trade can be progressed at the regional level; for the negotiation of quality trade products, so our voices and our health requirements is heard as a region by those manufacturing industries and exporting countries, much needs to be done at the national level through legislation to enable our regional voice demanding high quality imports (particularly food products) into our country.

We also continue to prioritize universal access to primary healthcare and public health services.

The Ministry of Health has contextualized the WHO Package of Essential NCD Interventions model, into a Primary Health Care model that takes integrates the Samoan culture and way of life.

The “PEN faa Samoa” approach took into selected communities a health NCD screening approach. The initial trials were successful & encouraging so we have now roll it out to cover all village communities.

The message achieved is that people in communities need to become more health seeking and visit a health clinic for checking of sugar levels, blood pressure, weight etc.

Samoa is also strengthening Rural District Hospitals and Health Centers as primary health and public health hubs for improved access to health within communities .

Mr Chairman at the start of my statement I alluded to the double burden of disease crippling our efforts towards our Healthy Islands vision.

I now wish to address what we perceive to be one of the biggest challenges to this vision and our development agenda.

This challenge Mr Chair is climate change and its impact on health.

Climate change presents Pacific Island Nations with unique challenges including rising sea levels, temperature rise, contamination of freshwater resources with saltwater, coastal erosion, an increase in extreme weather events, coral reef bleaching, and ocean acidification.

In February 2014 Samoa launched its Climate Adaptation Strategy for Health.

In this document we recognise that the reality is grim at best.

Climate change is already impacting and will continue to have significant impact on health. This is because climate change affects the essential requirements for health such as clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient and healthy food from both the land and the ocean and secure shelter.

We perceive that the risks from vector and communicable diseases will increase as changing rainfall and other associated climate change impacts will encourage spread of dengue, diarrhoea, malnutrition, with worsening of cardiovascular and respiratory conditions.

Mr Chairman, I believe that if we are to address the threat of what we now term as the triple burden of NCDs, communicable diseases, and the impacts of climate change , we really need to take things seriously now...The mere existence and future of our small island states for the next 100 years is grim,if drastic steps are not committed now, hence we need to stay focus strategically and pull our strength together.

Thank you Mr Chairman for this opportunity.