

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement of Mr. Viliami Va'inga Tone
Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Kingdom of Tonga
to the First Preparatory Committee for the
Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States,
United Nations, New York, 24th – 26th February 2014**

Co-Chairs,

Allow me to congratulate you both on your appointments as Co-Chairs of this First Preparatory Process, as well as to the members of your Bureau. You both have my delegation's full support. Allow me to also associate ourselves with the statements delivered by Bolivia, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, Nauru, on behalf of AOSIS, and Papua New Guinea, on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States or P-SIDS.

Co-Chairs,

The overarching theme chosen for the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States is, "The Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States through genuine and durable partnerships."

From the outset, we wish to reiterate our support for the theme as these "genuine and durable partnerships" are the catalysts for ensuring that SIDS and her partners develop a shared vision that allows our respective countries and institutions to work together to attain sustainable development results.

In the Pacific, growth looks very good at the regional level – over 6% average growth during what has been a very difficult economic period. Pacific growth is on par with that of Asian sub-regions. However, once you look beyond the regional statistics you find great variance. Timor Leste, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea are performing above the average of 6% while all others are well below and one even negative. My country Tonga is among those at the bottom level of 2%. Further, on average, it has been the non-resource rich Pacific countries have grown at around 1% per annum over the past decade, far less than population growth rates.

Co-Chairs

If there is one message we wish to emphasise, it is that there is no silver bullet to raise growth for the Pacific Islands. And that there is no niche product, or wealthy foreign investor that will change our economies overnight. And therefore what we must do is to look closely at what countries in our region are doing – the markets we are trading in, and with whom we are trading. We must focus on doing more of this and doing it better. Ensuring that any development efforts are sustainable in the long term. Such hard work is the only successful route to higher growth.

As a Pacific Small Island Developing State or P-SIDS, the strategies on sustainable development are clearly articulated and the links between the global, regional and national targets must complement if not build on each other. Both the BPOA and MSI outline the pathway for sustainable development and this Third International conference we are preparing for stresses the need for continued efforts from all partners.

Co-Chairs

In the case of Tonga, our development priorities are led by the Tonga Strategic Development Framework or TSDF. We have drawn from that framework 5 priorities to which we will focus and direct our resources over the next 3 years in order to achieve sustainable results. These are namely:

1. **Facilitating broad based sustainable growth to achieve at least 2.5 per cent average growth rate through the partnership with the people of Tonga;** through improved private sector development, improved community development; and maintaining sustainable fiscal consolidation;
2. **Develop effective and efficient benchmarking for delivery of social and community services, and general public administration based on relevant comparators;** through the establishment of a robust monitoring and evaluation system that manages for development results;
3. **Provision of enabling infrastructure for sustainable development;** this focuses on the need to provide basic community facilities that make everyday life and business activity possible, such as communication, water and waste management, energy supply systems and transportation. In addition to these economic infrastructure are social infrastructure such as hospitals and schools that must also be maintained;
4. **Improve the resilience of the economy and communities to better manage natural disasters caused by climate changes.** Based on modelled losses from cyclones, earthquakes and tsunamis, Tonga stands to lose up to 4.3% of its GDP. Coping with this vulnerability imposes a heavy price. More recently on the 11th January 2014, Tropical Cyclone Ian, a category 5 cyclone and the first of its kind ever to hit Tonga, hit our central islands of Ha'apai which now has an estimated 10% loss on GDP with damage of up to USD50 million;
5. Last but certainly not the least, **continue the public sector, public enterprises, and microeconomic reforms;** increasing the productivity of the public sector is a critical pillar to uphold strong economic linkages. Planning and budgeting processes need to be improved, and state-owned enterprises reformed to deliver basic services to more people, including those in rural areas

In this context, it is imperative that governments support the efforts and demand for sustainable development, and it is critical we continue to systematically address these issues at all levels, nationally, regionally and globally.

Co-Chairs I thank you