



TUVALU

STATEMENT

by

**Honorable Prime Minister of Tuvalu
Hon Enele Sosene Sopoaga**

at the

High Level Signature Ceremony for the Paris Agreement

General Assembly Hall of the United Nations

New York

Thursday April 22nd, 2016

Please check against delivery

Secretary General

Heads of Government, and Ministers

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today represents a historic moment. We, Heads of Government and Representatives of Governments are attending a signing ceremony for an Agreement that will change the world. We have now set ourselves on a path to properly address climate change.

Some may say it's only a small step. We need to make it a huge one. We need to take the Paris Agreement and mould it into an international call to action. It must become a document of revival. With the necessary effort by all of us, the Paris Agreement will change our lives and the lives of future generations. We must make this happen.

We are all here to sign the Agreement. But this is only the first step. We must also ratify the Agreement to make sure it enters into force at soonest possible time. We, the people of Tuvalu are so committed to the Paris Agreement that parliament has already agreed to ratify it. I have come here with our instrument of ratification. I hope all of you will follow and encourage your parliaments to do the same.

I would like to refer to a preamble paragraph of the decision that accompanies the Paris Agreement which says: *Recognizing that climate change represents an urgent and potentially irreversible threat to human societies and the planet*". There is no greater call to action than these words: "*a potentially irreversible threat to human societies and the planet*". We must ensure that climate change is not irreversible. We must act quickly and we must act together. We must all sign and ratify. Climate change is not just a concern for small island States, like my own. It's everyone's concern.

Of course the Paris Agreement does not have everything we wanted. Ideally we would have liked a specific target of below 1.5 deg C relative to pre-industrial levels. We may well regret that we were not more forward looking on this issue. The science of climate change is becoming increasingly concerning with every new assessment produced. In this regard, I welcome the recent decision by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's to develop a Special Report on the impacts of 1.5 deg C. I hope that this report is not undermined by politics and the real impacts of climate change are revealed. I suspect that this report will have serious implications for small island countries like my own. It may well spell a greater need for early action to avoid the "irreversible threat".

I would also like to refer to a preamble paragraph of the Paris Agreement which says: *Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when*

taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity,

There is much that can be read in this paragraph. We must honour its intent sincerely and forthrightly. We must engage everyone in our challenge to address climate change. At the same time, we must not leave anyone behind.

There is one group of people within this preamble paragraph that will become an increasing concern. These are the migrants. Recent studies suggest that an average of 22.5 million people have been displaced each year by climate or weather-related disasters in the last seven years. This is equivalent to 62,000 people every day. This is a staggering figure and should ring alarm bells throughout the world. It is inevitable that this number will rise as the impacts of climate change become worse.

The plight of people displaced within countries and across borders must be addressed as a matter of urgency. They do not fit the definition of refugees under the Refugee Convention. They fall through the current mechanisms of protection. We urgently need to establish legal protection for people internally displaced and displaced across borders from the impacts of climate change. To this end, I welcome the establishment of the Task for on Displacement under the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage. This Task Force was created in the accompanying decision to the Paris Agreement. But this will not be enough.

We must work towards a new regime for people displaced by the impacts of climate change. I would like to seek a UN General Assembly resolution establishing a system of legal protection for people displaced by the impacts of climate change and to ensure they are afforded the necessary support and protection of rights they need and deserve. I should add that the concern about displaced people is not an indication that the people of Tuvalu want to migrate. This is certainly not the case. We want to stay. Our concern about displacement is a humanitarian one. I hope all of you here will join me in making this happen.

I am proud to say that my government was very active in ensuring that Loss and Damage was included in the Paris Agreement. There was very strong pressure from some key developed countries to have Loss and Damage excluded from the Agreement. The developing countries of the world were united on this issue. I wish to congratulate all who were engaged in these negotiations. This includes many non government organisations that worked so hard to make sure that Loss and Damage was not lost and damaged.

I wish to take this opportunity particularly to acknowledge the vision of the French Presidency in their support of our position. On the issue of Loss and Damage, the Pacific region has suffered a number of severe cyclones in the last few years. Cyclones Ian, Pam, Winston and Zena have caused hundreds of millions of dollars worth of damage and caused the loss of many lives. We in

SIDS/LDC and other particularly vulnerable countries, as recognised under the UNFCCC, urgently need better access to climate change financing to protect our islands. The disbursement of the Green Climate Facility must be based on the level of vulnerability, not on how well a Party can write its adaptation or mitigation proposals.

And we, like many other regions of the world, also need insurance arrangements to help us rebuild from these disasters. I am hoping that we can get funding support from donors for a Pacific Island Climate Change Insurance Facility. I seek international support for this Facility.

Finally I would like to refer to Part Five of the Paris decision which refers to Non-Party Stakeholders. It calls on all stakeholders “*to scale up their efforts and support actions to reduce emissions and/or to build resilience and decrease vulnerability to the adverse effect of climate change*”. It establishes a Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action platform. We government representatives must do all we can to foster these efforts by civil society, the private sector, financial institutions, cities, local governments on rural and outer islands, and other sub-national authorities. On everyday basis the local governments are the real actors on the ground.

We all must work together to make the Paris Agreement an agreement to change the world. We must protect those who are displaced. Let us use the Paris Agreement as a driving force for our sustainable future. The Paris Agreement must save Tuvalu, and save the world.

I thank you.

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