



SOLOMON ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

STATEMENT BY HON. BRADLEY SMOKY TOVOSIA, (MP), MINISTER FOR MINES, ENERGY AND RURAL ELECTRIFICATION DURING THE UNITED NATION 2023 WATER CONFERENCE, FROM 22 TO 24 MARCH 2023, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Co-Presidents,
Head of Delegations,
Excellences,
Distinguish Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Greetings from the Solomon Islands.

Mr. President,

My delegation and I on behalf of the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Hon Manasseh Damukana Sogavare, who was invited but unable to attend due to other important commitment, I am honoured to represent Solomon Islands Government and to be part of the United Nation 2023 Water Conference now taking place in New York, USA. On behalf of the Government of Solomon Islands, I wish to extend our sincere greetings and gratitude to Tajikistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, with the support of UN-Water for your collaborative leadership in co-hosting and convening this United Nation 2023 Water Conference.

The importance of water is multifaceted. It is essential for basic survival to economic growth, food security, productivity, health, ecosystem, biodiversity, energy, infrastructure, production, among others. It is therefore, natural to convene a Comprehensive Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the

International Decade for Action on “Water for Sustainable Development ”, 2018-2028 to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mr. President, under the leadership of the Hon Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, Solomon Islands has made progress in ensuring access to drinking water and sanitation for all, over the years. I wish to update you on some of our voluntary commitments progress against Solomon Islands National Development Strategy (NDS) 2016-2035 and related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Targets towards the “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2028 to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

First, the Solomon Islands Government, under its key policy objectives recognizes the importance of providing an enabling environment to stimulate economic growth in the country and ensuring the sustainable utilization and conservation of natural resources, including water, its protection and combating the adverse effects of climate change respectively.

Mr. President, over the past 20 years, the Solomon Islands Government commitment and priority has been to provide access to safe and reliable water supplies to rural and urban communities. However, there has been little progress in achieving targets for Sustainable Development Goal 6, with many of the indicators showing a decline rather than an improvement.

a) Access to Water Services

The proportion of the Solomon Islands population with access to basic water services has decreased from 69.3 per cent in 2015 to 67.3 per cent in 2020. This overall figure masks the inequality of access to basic water services recorded in rural areas, which falls far below that of urban areas: 59.4 percent of the rural population having access to basic water services as against 91.4 percent access in urban areas.

b) Access to Sanitation Services

On the other hand, Improvements to sanitation have been slow. Open defecation is prevalent in Solomon Islands, with 44.8 percent of the population recorded as practicing open defecation in 2020, meaning that SDG 6.2 (ending open defecation) is still a long way from being met and is unlikely to be met by 2030. Significant disparities also exist in the access to basic sanitation services between rural and urban areas. Access to basic sanitation in rural areas is at 21 per cent, compared to 78 per cent in urban areas. Despite the high prevalence of open defecation in the country, the proportion of the population with access to basic sanitation services has increased slightly: from 32 per cent in 2015 to 35 per cent in 2020.

c) Access to Hygiene Services

There is a lack in recent data on estimates of basic hygiene. No national data is available for the urban population in 2020 but data from 2015 shows that the proportion of the population with access to basic hygiene service was low, at 38 per cent. In the rural areas, in 2020, the proportion of the rural population with access to basic hygiene service in Solomon Islands was 28.4 per cent, the same figure as for 2015.

One of the county's challenges has been that of non-availability of data on WASH SDG6 areas, which is crucial to drive advocacy, prioritization in planning and investment on WASH services. As a country, we are proud to say that improvements have been made on generating data and evidence on the current status of WASH services in schools and in health care facilities. With technical support from UNICEF, the country has now managed to establish national baselines to determine the actual status of WASH services in schools and health care facilities. Plans to strengthen the monitoring, reporting and tracking of the improvements of services through a harmonised approach which aligned to SDGs are now at an advanced stage for these two sub-sectors.

Mr. President, it is important to highlight the fact that provision of improved water and sanitation services remains a key priority of the NDS 2016-2035 towards achieving the objective 2 of Alleviating poverty in Solomon Islands. The NDS 2016-2035 aims to reach 60%

of the population access to Safe drinking water by year 2035. This is consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation for all. The SDG 6 is an indivisible goal that requires joint-implementation and integration of different agencies. The Ministry of health, environment, mines, energy and rural electrification, infrastructure and Solomon Islands Water Authority are part of the WASH national committee that work to deliver WASH programmes at national level.

The Solomon Islands Government has also made a voluntary commitment to improve the livelihoods of the people of Solomon Islands, the NDS called for the development of sector plans. For water and sanitation, the Solomon Islands National Water Resource and Sanitation (WATSAN) Policy was formulated. The WATSAN Policy was created with the purpose to provide government leadership in the water and sanitation sector, and includes the goals of protecting water sources, identifying national priority areas, providing clear policy goals and objectives and assigning agency responsibilities. It also provides strategies for adapting to global climate change. Additionally, rural water supply within the Solomon Islands is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, under the Solomon Islands Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (RWASH) program through the RWASH Policy and Strategic Plan.

Mr. President, to address the water supply challenges in the urban areas the Solomon Islands Government and Solomon Islands Water Authority (SIWA) are currently implementing the Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project (UWSSSP) as part of the SIWA Five Year Plan and 30 Year Strategic Plans as the Road Map for the SIWA in water supply and wastewater development. The UWSSSP is a major investment in the quality and reliability of our water supply to five growing urban and peri-urban regions of the Solomon Islands. It also will promote effective, efficient and safe urban sanitation services, and provide programs to encourage better hygiene behaviours in urban areas and informal settlements.

The Solomon Islands Government has also made voluntary commitments to strengthen Community Based Resource Management (CBRM) initiatives to contribute to fulfilling SDG

14. Therefore, through the Solomon Islands Community Based Coastal and Marine Resource Management Strategy 2021 - 2025 set of activities to scale up CBRM support to more communities across the Solomon Islands. This would improve the quality of CBRM support provided to communities through the development of key national level systems and increased capacity and involvement of Provincial authorities. For us, coastal communities' watershed areas are safe and improved in the next decade.

The Solomon Islands faces huge challenges dealing with pollution management given the growth in diversity of the types of wastes, of which most lack sustainable and economically viable end-of-life treatment options nationally. Some of these wastes are sources of water pollution. Nevertheless, the Solomon Islands Waste Management and Pollution Control Strategy 2017-2026 focuses on managing waste and controlling pollution in the natural environment, including water resources.

At the sixth Pacific Water and Wastewater Ministers' Forum 2022, from 14-15 November, in Nadi, Fiji, the Solomon Islands Government further committed to strengthened engagement in water security as a key component of Pacific resilience, and encouraged greater participation of the sector in dialogue for action supporting climate and disaster resilience at the local, national and regional levels.

Mr. President, even with challenges in terms of capacity, financial resources and competing priorities, the Solomon Islands is doing what it can to address water and sanitation issues with the support of partners and stakeholders.

Recognizing that, according to the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Synthesis Report 2018 on Water and Sanitation, the world is not on track to achieve water-related Sustainable Development Goals and targets at the global level by 2030 at the current rate of progress. The Solomon Islands hereby make further voluntary commitment.

1. Strengthening institutional frameworks and the enabling environment for water, sanitation and hygiene in the country.

2. Accelerate efforts needed to prioritise and enhance urgent action on sustainable financing, data and information, capacity development and governance with development partners in addressing water resource issues in Solomon Islands.
3. Establish a legal framework for water resources management and implement by 2024.
4. Continuation of the Greater Honiara Urban Development Strategy and Action Plan, which the SI government endorsed in 2018. This plan prioritizes investments to improve quality and coverage of water supply and sanitation services for sustainable urban development.
5. Follow through with Solomon Islands Water Authority 30 Year Strategic Plan and 5 Year Action Plan, which have been implemented in the Greater Honiara Area as well as five other urban areas.
6. Commissioning of the country's first Water Treatment Plan later in the year. A vital infrastructure that will provide uninterrupted safe and clean water supply for Honiara City.
7. Strengthen monitoring and planning and budgeting for SDG 6 targets implementation

Mr. President,

To foster implementation of Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028, we need to scale up inclusive collaboration and partnership and to accelerate concrete actions. Similarly, I would like to highlight the urgency of resource mobilization and enhanced investment in water infrastructure including the availing of dedicated financial resources and technologies to island countries to sustainably conserve, use, protect and build a better and more resilient future.

With this few remarks, tagio tumas