

United Nations 2023 Water Conference

Wednesday, 22 March 2023

Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Tonga to the United Nations

**Intervention by the Chief Executive Officer of the
Ministry for Public Enterprises, Mr. Sione 'Akauola**

Interactive Dialogue 1

Water for Health: Access to WASH, including the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation.

It is a great honour to provide the Kingdom of Tonga's intervention on this crucial theme of the UN Water Conference. Our presence here today signifies the gravity of water, sanitation, and hygiene issues in our countries, regions, and the world at large. Tonga is aware that the lack of access to safe drinking water, serious negative impact of untreated water & wastewater, lack of good sanitation facilities, and poor hygienic environment poses significant health risks and are fundamental development constraints for our nations.

Today's conference has not only brought our countries closer together, but it also enables us to share experiences and knowledge on how to mitigate against climate change while working towards delivering sustainable, affordable, and accessible water, sanitation, and hygiene for all. The Tonga Government acknowledges and reaffirms its continuing commitment to providing and sustaining "Access to Clean Water and Sanitation." Today, Tonga reaffirms our commitment and calls for accelerated action and progress towards achieving the global Sustainable Development Goal of "Ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Moving towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals 6 and its targets, I am happy to state that our Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) Sector continues to be the top priority sector under our government's Agenda, and effective planning and implementation in the WASH sector are progressing, despite the challenges we face.

In November last year, the 6th Pacific Water & Wastewater Ministers Forum met in Fiji and realized that achieving the targets of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 6) for universal access to improved drinking water and

sanitation facilities remains a great challenge. While there is progress towards improving access to safe water and sanitation in our Pacific region, including Tonga, these efforts are not keeping up with population growth and urbanizing populations, apart from the emerging impacts of climate change.

Tonga and the other Pacific Island countries have strongly committed to strengthen engagement in water security as a key component of Pacific resilience and called for greater participation of the sector in dialogues for action supporting climate and disaster resilience at the local, national, and regional levels. Tonga and the Pacific Island Countries also highlighted the urgency of scaling up national and regional investments to support the science, infrastructure, and local capacity needed to establish and maintain locally appropriate and sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene solutions resilient to the impacts of climate change and disaster. We acknowledge this call and urge development partners to urgently support enhanced accessibility of the sector to existing and emerging funding mechanisms such as climate financing.

Tonga and the Pacific countries, noting the disproportionately large number of Pacific people living without access to safe sanitation and hygiene facilities, call for urgent targeted and collaborative action by governments, development partners, and civil society over the next five years (coinciding with the final five years of the UN Decade of Action on Water and Sanitation) to address this relatively neglected development issue with profound impacts on human health, livelihoods, and resilience.

In conclusion, Tonga is confident that this conference would be a key instrument for the realization of increased collaboration and partnerships that can help our respective countries establish a common stance, a united voice on international issues, and provide the collective support necessary to address the common constraints and challenges we face in the Pacific region, including Tonga.

Thank you.