



Statement by Viliami Va'inga Tōnē, Permanent Representative of  
Tonga to the United Nations

at

Fourth Plenary of the United Nations Water Conference 2023

General Assembly Hall  
United Nations Headquarters  
New York

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15:00 p.m. – 18:00 p.m.

Mr. President, Excellences, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honor to address this assembly on behalf of the Government of Tonga, as we participate in the UN Water Conference 2023. We are deeply grateful for the continuous efforts of the UN Water Secretariat in organizing this significant event.

This year's conference theme, "Accelerating Change," emphasizes the need for prompt action by governments to provide better quality, accessible safe drinking water, and sanitation in our communities. Climate change and COVID-19 have significantly impacted our water sources system and infrastructure. We need to stand together to seek programs and investments to address these challenges in a smarter more efficient manner that will help delivery in a more timely manner in keeping with the UN's call to accelerate change.

"Resilience and Water Security," one of the five critical areas of this year's Water Conference theme, is of great significance to Tonga, an isolated Pacific island, vulnerable to natural disasters. It has urged us to focus on improving the resilience of our Island Kingdom to climate change, potential pandemics, and other disasters by strengthening our water security, wastewater, sanitation, and hygiene. This theme inspires us to seek innovative and practical solutions to reach an outcome of successfully adapting to challenging water and sanitation issues. It is also connected to the key planning mechanisms that trigger Tonga investments in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and led to our incorporating WASH into our national planning structures and processes.

Although much has been achieved in the past 25 years towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), much remains to be done to achieve universal access to "safely managed" water and sanitation (including hygiene) by 2030, as set out in SDG 6. The Government of Tonga has included the principles of SDG 6 in our national plan and government priorities, and we will tailor our approaches and results areas to each organizational context, with links to guidance documents that provide further detail on implementation.

Climate change and environment-related health issues negatively impact water resources in the Pacific, including Tonga. The UN Water Conference is a reminder to our Pacific Island countries that major water, wastewater, and sanitation problems will remain in the Pacific unless we pay heed to "accelerating change." We are now in a stronger position, supported by international-level engagement, to ensure political commitment to developing and implementing sustainable policies and legislation throughout the region to address the existing and future problems.

We must join in an action-oriented effort to attack and solve the problems that beset our water resources, using solutions that are affordable, resource-efficient, energy-efficient, locally adapted, and do not compromise the sustainability and resiliency of our water processes.

There is a challenge that has been posed for us to turn words into deeds. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals for water and sanitation in an accelerated manner is a daunting task that requires collective wisdom and serious consideration from all member countries.

In conclusion, I am confident that the recommendations and outcome documents of this year's conference will lead to the adoption of more efficient, effective and timely, coordinated measures in addressing issues related to water and sanitation in our respective home countries.

Thank you (Mālō 'aupito)