



National Statement

PRIME MINISTER OF TUVALU

Honourable Mr. Kausea Natano

at

The United Nations Conference
on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the
Objectives of the International Decade for Action,
“Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028

March 22-24, 2023

New York

Mr. President

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring to you Mr. President, greetings from the People and the Government of Tuvalu, and I extend my heartfelt gratitude for the hospitality that the UN family have accorded to me and my delegation.

I would also like to congratulate you Mr. President for your continued dedication and leadership in pushing forward the implementation objectives of the Decade and the Water Action Decade 2018 to 2028 despite the challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. President

We recognized the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 Global Acceleration Framework and its contributions in preparing the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action. Our participation reflects the close alignment to Government's priorities around water related problems whether it is linked to infrastructure development, housing, economic growth, or climate change and environment. We consider this sector critical and essential to the achievement of many Sustainable Development Goals.

Drinking water supply is primarily achieved through harvesting and storing of rainwater. This harvested rainwater is, by far, Tuvalu's most important and widely used potable water resource. It is the only water resource that is essentially free and delivered by nature directly to the consumer.

Groundwater is also used for non-potable uses throughout Tuvalu, and is, therefore, an important factor in reducing the pressure on drinking water supplies. Excessive nutrient leaching is causing eutrophication and associated macro-algal blooms in some of our lagoons. This will lead to nearshore habitat loss, decrease in fish numbers, and causing challenges for fishermen. Inadequate sanitation including poorly functioning septic systems, are thought to be the main contributors to the excessive nutrient loads to the lagoon.

Mr. President

Like many other Pacific Island Countries, Tuvalu faces pressures with limited water resources and storage capacity and poor sanitation infrastructure. Limited institutional capacity, thinly spread human resources, and irregular funding sources further challenge our ability to effectively respond to water and sanitation issues.

Compounding these challenges are the impacts of climate variability and climate change. For my country Tuvalu, and I believe for the Pacific as well, climate change is the single greatest existential threat to our survival. Climate change has increased the frequency of extreme water-related weather events - from melting glaciers to sea-level rise, to intense heat and rainfall - impacting our lives and livelihoods and threatening our very existence, and this requires urgent actions and ambitions to address these threats.

Our vulnerability was dramatically illustrated in 2011 and 2022 when my country entered a prolonged period of drought, for which a state of emergency was declared and drinking water supplies in some of our communities were pushed to the point of exhaustion. We had an outbreak of water-borne diseases in 2011 concurrent with and apparently precipitated by La Nina-associated drought conditions. As I speak today, we are still experiencing dry spells in some of the islands in Tuvalu.

Mr. President

We also experienced the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that heightened the critical need for access to clean water and sanitation. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, was not the only disaster of the past two years. Regional countries in the Pacific including Tuvalu had to deal with multiple disasters like droughts and tropical cyclones while managing the pandemic at the same time. Tuvalu as well as other countries continue to feel the impacts of COVID-19 and recovery is rather slow.

We support the idea to share knowledge and learn best practices of water-related issues that are commonly affecting the different Regions amid the COVID-19 pandemic. We have to be more resilient and prompt in our response, which this Conference aims to raise awareness of the global water crisis and decide on action to achieve internationally agreed water-related goals.

Mr. President

In our effort to achieve tangible results, we have plans such as the Te Kete (Tuvalu National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2021-2030) and the Tuvalu Infrastructure Strategy and Investment Plan (TISIP) 2020-2025 that include some direction on investment needs in water and sanitation through infrastructure development. Despite all these plans, we still have competing priorities that hinder the fulfillment of our aspirations.

Several useful water governance mechanisms are already in place in Tuvalu. We are applying an integrated approach to dealing with water-related impacts of climate change, through collaborative efforts between the different sectors in the Government and Non-Government Organisations. Tuvalu's exposures to these impacts have been reflected in recent climate change-related documents. Therefore, we should never lose sight on the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Mr. President

Tuvalu's limited fresh water and financial resources mean that appropriate technologies must be a key component of efforts to secure our water and climate resilience.

To safeguard against water shortages, we have already pursued alternative sources such as desalination. However, these are expensive to operate and maintain, and cannot be relied upon alone to protect Tuvalu from the impacts of drought. A more cost-effective approach to achieving water security is to properly manage and conserve our scarce water resources and to power these, using renewable energy sources.

We can significantly increase its resilience to the impacts of drought by investing in Disaster Risk Reduction approaches, rather than relying on immediate disaster response. Undertaking risk assessments and putting in place effective Early Warning Systems and Responses can ensure our people are well prepared for extended dry times. However, these systems and responses do not come cheap nowadays.

We acknowledge the support and strengthen the engagement of the private sector and development partners in addressing and contributing to the attainment of SDG 6 in particular.

Mr. President

I hope that out of this Conference we will be able to come up with a meaningful outcome document, strong message, and identified actions that will truly accelerate our progress towards water-related goals and targets and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

I thank you for your attention.

Tuvalu mo te Atua.