

*PIF Statement*

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

*Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa  
Hon. Fiame Naomi Mataafa*

*SIDS Session*

***Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality***

*Perspective of SIDS including main findings from mid-term review of the SAMOA Pathway*

***Wednesday, 10 July 2019, 09:00-11:00, Conference Room 4***

*Mr. Chairman*  
*Madam Moderator*  
*Distinguished Panellists*  
*Excellencies,*

1. I have the honour to deliver this keynote address on behalf of the members of the Pacific Islands Forum and its current Chair, H.E, President Baron Waqa of Nauru.
2. Five years ago in my country, the global community agreed on the blueprint for the sustainable development of Small Island Developing States. The S.A.M.O.A Pathway, helped to shape the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in 2015. This included gaining global agreement on 3 key SIDS priorities of, SDG 13 on Climate Action, SDG 14 on Oceans management and SDG 17 on partnerships and means of implementation. That same year, our moral leadership was instrumental in sealing the deal on the Paris Agreement.
3. Together, we demonstrated the power of collective SIDS leadership and voice. But, equally important, is the need for leadership on implementation and accountability for our promises.
4. Allow me to highlight the Pacific's implementation efforts, challenges, and proposed ways forward in the context of this year's theme of empowerment, inclusivity and equality.
5. Excellencies, in 2015, the Pacific Islands Forum committed to Agenda 2030 and agreed to 'tailor and contextualize' it, along with the SAMOA Pathway, Paris Agreement and other global development commitments to fit our Pacific realities. Especially important was minimizing reporting by having one regional report to account for our multiple global commitments.
6. Since then, we have embraced and integrated the 2030 Agenda, SAMOA Pathway and other global commitments into our regional and national policy making and accountability processes and frameworks. Nine Pacific countries have completed their Voluntary National Review processes as part of national planning processes. Importantly, we have undertaken a regional peer review of the Vanuatu VNR process, and my country provided peer support to the New Zealand VNR process, both, are Pacific innovations and global firsts.
7. Another Pacific innovation is the 2018 Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report, which serves as the Pacific's single report on the 2030 Agenda and the SAMOA Pathway. It will inform our engagement at the UN Climate Action Summit, the UN SDGs Summit and the SAMOA Pathway High Level Meeting this year.
8. So how are we doing on policy? Pacific Leaders have prioritised the empowerment of and ensuring inclusivity of vulnerable groups in particular women and persons with disabilities through the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Framework for

Resilient Development in the Pacific. In addition, we have prioritised access to quality education and addressing the challenges of Non Communicable Diseases. All Pacific countries have national action plans or policies that mirror these regional commitments.

9. Access to education has improved through free education policies in some Pacific countries. All Pacific countries have some form of social protection and while spending is low, it is increasing. There are legislations specific to gender equality and persons with disabilities in the Marshall Islands and Fiji, and disability accessibility requirements in the Samoa National Building Codes. Encouragingly, there are disability benefits in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, New Caledonia, Tonga and Tuvalu. In 2016, my country introduced temporary special measures to ensure 10% of Parliamentary seats are held by women and Vanuatu introduced similar measures to ensure inclusion of women in local government.
10. In addition to these good practices, the Pacific report highlights positive economic growth; increasing returns from tourism, fisheries and remittances; improving empowerment of women and significant progress in marine management and conservation.
11. Despite these efforts and progress, we have mixed results, with some Pacific countries and sub-groupings progressing further than others. As a region, the Pacific is not on track to achieve many of the SDGs except for a few targets. Furthermore, our vulnerabilities are increasing and inequality is deepening.
12. Our sea levels are rising more than 50% higher than the global average and our corals are dying. Disasters, in particular cyclones, flooding and droughts have increased in intensity and costs from 3.8% in 2012 to 15.6% in 2016 of total regional GDP. One catastrophic event is undoing decades of progress, claiming lives, destroying vital infrastructure, homes, biodiversity and adversely affecting food security and the delivery of services and livelihoods. Cyclones Pam, Winston and Gita caused 64%, 30% and 38% of GDP losses in Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga respectively. Four of the 9 tropical cyclones in the South West Pacific in the last 12 months were severe Category 3 or greater. The 2017 World Risk Report identified the Pacific as of highest risk to natural hazards with six of the 15 most vulnerable countries in the world in the Pacific. Pockets of populations in the Solomons Islands, Papua New Guinea and Kiribati have already been displaced due to encroaching seas and in Fiji due to cyclone devastation. Furthermore, our waste generation is outpacing our capacity to manage and are impacting our environment, ocean and marine life.
13. While we grapple with the externally induced impact of the climate crisis, which amplify our challenges and vulnerabilities, we also face the reality of overall poor development outcomes and insecurities in many of our countries.
14. Despite sustained economic growth, it has been inequitable. Our people are struggling to make ends meet with one in every four Pacific Islander living below national basic needs poverty lines. Unemployment, particularly of women and young

people is high, with youth unemployment at double the global rate. Pacific men outnumber Pacific women in paid employment by two to one.

15. Approximately 1 out of 10 Pacific islanders are living with some form of disability with implications on resources and services. Too many of our women are victims of violence with some of the highest global rates of violence against women in the Pacific. Women representation in Pacific parliaments is the lowest globally at 7.7%. Of the four countries globally that are without women parliamentarians, 3 are in the Pacific.
16. Gravely concerning is the high incidence of Non-Communicable Diseases. Seven Pacific countries are in the top 10 countries globally with the highest rates of diabetes. In 10 Pacific countries, 5 out of 10 people are overweight and on average 7 out of 10 deaths are caused by NCDs with rates as high as 84%.
17. Excellencies, while we have made a good start, it is clearly not enough. Moving forward, Pacific leaders are committed to more targeted support to enhance opportunities for women, youth, and persons with disabilities; addressing gender gaps in employment and decision making; enhancing sustainable tourism and fisheries while conserving the Pacific's rich biodiversity; tackling NCDs and the dual threats of climate change and disasters more effectively. The Pacific is grateful for the \$1.57 billion from the Green Climate Fund. Our challenge now is implementation ensuring we better utilise existing funding; strengthen capacities, institutions and partnerships; and increase investment in statistical systems.
18. To conclude, I offer five Pacific lessons for SIDS and development partners' consideration.
  1. Good intentions, plans and policies are not enough. We need the absorptive capacity, strong systems and importantly the financing to be able to implement and account for results.
  2. Balance and integrate the global fight for climate justice with addressing the immediate national needs of our people to access water, food, education, health and economic opportunities.
  3. Rapidly accelerate efforts focusing on transformational and innovative interventions including access to technology, trade, ICT and know-how;
  4. Ratchet up our partnerships including funding and replicating SIDS-relevant solutions through peer to peer learning and continue to work in mutually respectful and accountable partnerships.
  5. Finally, we need more streamlined and coherent global policy implementation and reporting processes and requirements tailored to the limited capacities of SIDS respecting and using our existing national and regional reporting mechanisms and processes.

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