

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Pacific Small Islands Developing States (PSIDS) comprising Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, the Kingdom of Tonga.

We wish to associate ourselves with the statement made by Grenada on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States.

At the outset, we would like to thank you for convening this meeting on the thematic issue of "drought". The focus on "drought" is important to the Pacific SIDS due to its impact on the availability of water for human consumption; livestock; agriculture and other sectors of the economy, and its consequence on health as well as the livelihood of the people.

Mr Chairman,

There are five main drinking water sources in the Pacific; (i) rain water; (ii) ground water; (iii) surface water; (iv) desalinated water; and (5) imported drinking water. Not all sources are readily accessible in all Pacific SIDS, with some countries relying mainly on rainwater for their drinking and household uses. This renders the Pacific SIDS extremely vulnerable to natural variability in precipitation patterns or changes in storm tracks.

The events of drought are widespread in the Asia and Pacific region. The Pacific states have also experienced drought induced by ENSO. Above average precipitation has been observed over the tropical Pacific, and these oceanic and atmospheric conditions indicate the presence of El Nino. Since 1977, El Nino events have become more frequent. Each El Nino event has resulted in water shortages and drought in our region.

The impact of drought in the region has been felt most especially in the rural areas where it has impacted on the health of the population with a rise in water borne diseases; as well as on the livestock and other agricultural activities.

It is also predicted that the occurrence of drought will become more frequent in the future for our region due to climate change. Attention should therefore continue to be focused on building greater institutional and technical capacity to cope with drought in terms of early warning systems; risk management; preparedness plans, monitoring, mitigation and adaptation measures to enhance resilience, and reduce vulnerability.

It is therefore important to extend the drought warning/climate monitoring capabilities to the Pacific SIDS. Information sharing on weather systems and drought patterns in the different regions is also vital.

There is also a need for support to strengthen comprehensive water management strategies at national and regional level. Research and development efforts can also be directed to investigate cost effective desalinization technology as well as technology for catchments systems.

Pacific SIDS, due to the nature of their location and limited human resource constraints, face serious challenges in their ability to address the challenges of drought unless the international community provides additional assistance to supplement programmes currently underway including GEF and UNFCCC funded project on climate change impacts; and adaptation plans (NAPAs for the five Pacific SIDS who are also LDCs); as well several bilateral programmes providing support for national, village and community water systems.

Climate change and the prediction of more episodes of drought are projected to also impact food security. Already many Pacific SIDS are dependent on imported foods such as rice and the recent rapid increase in food prices, accompanied by shortages of some basic commodities, indicate a pattern that might recur for the future.

At the same time, drought and food security have been determining factors which have impacted on migration patterns and resettlement.

These are issues which have enormous implications for all countries, and actions to minimize such outcomes must begin by considering the root causes.

We urge development partners to scale up their assistance in order to address these issues in order to maintain stability and to enable our countries to achieve the MDGs.