



**Statement by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tonga  
Honourable Hu'akavameiliku**

**High-Level Opening of the Seventy-ninth session of the  
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

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**Mr. President,  
Madam Executive Secretary of the ESCAP,  
Heads of State and Government,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

I am honoured to address the high-level opening of the seventy-ninth session of the Commission.

The theme for this session: “Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development” reflects a key priority and challenge for us. We must act urgently. We must seize our collective duty and opportunity to strengthen regional cooperation to mitigate against the adverse impacts of climate change and natural disasters.

We have been talking about this now for decades. BUT, how much has been delivered of the promised commitments to combat and rise up against the adverse impacts of climate change?

For countries from the Pacific region, the manifold impacts of ever accelerating climate change are our greatest existential security threat today.

I have said this many times over and I say it again to drive home that this key threat limits our development opportunities and it is a reality we, in the Pacific region, face every day. Not by choice, but by necessity this also means for us to adjust and re-shape our view on development.

This is why we strongly call for a risk-informed sustainable development.

Sustainable development for us requires inter-linked systems and processes centred around building resiliency. For Small Island Developing States (SIDS) such as ours that are increasingly and unpredictably prone to climatic disasters this is not a luxury, it is a MUST.

Our future does not depend on us alone, and this must be recognized. Our peoples' future demands genuine and durable partnerships on equal footings and capable of supporting of our domestic aspirations and goals.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, first let's agree with scientific evidence that we live in a moment of climate emergency.

We have no miracle vaccine - we have an emergency threatening our livelihoods, security, and wellbeing. Achieving net zero emissions by 2050 must be our mutual blueprint to survival.

This is not some imagined tale. This is our lived experience. This is why for so long we have issued a strong call for accelerated and ambitious climate action throughout the entire world.

When we call to limit a rise in the global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius this is not a haphazard political statement. We know that without this our very survival in the Pacific region, and indeed throughout our shared Planet Earth, is threatened.

As a member of the United Nations' Asia Pacific Group and UNESCAP, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) has set a collective aim to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. All our development partners are hereby invited to join us in this important journey.

We call on all developed nations to finalize the agreement on the *New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance*. We call unwaveringly for support to increase allocations for adaptation finance.

We urge the development of simplified access modalities to climate finance. We must facilitate better access for most vulnerable countries like the Pacific Small Island Development States (PSIDS). We encourage support for the work currently undertaken on the Multi-Dimensional Vulnerability Index.

Moreover, building on the outcome of COP27 last year, we urge developed countries, international financial institutions, and the private sector to mobilize support for the new Loss and Damage Financing Facility.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the clock is ticking ever faster.

It is beyond high time we abandon rhetoric. We must strengthen our utmost commitment to urgent climate action NOW.

There is a Tongan phrase, which embodies this principle: "*Ngaue Fakataha*"- let us work together today to ensure the future of our generations ahead.

Malo 'aupito.