STATEMENT

HON. SIAOSI ‘OFAKIVAHAFOLAU SOVALENI
(HON. HUʻAKAVAMEILIKU)
PRIME MINISTER
HIS MAJESTY’S GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA
&
PRESIDENT OF THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE SIDS DOCK ASSEMBLY

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

13TH SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY
AGENCY (IRENA) ASSEMBLY: SIDS MINISTERIAL

“CLIMATE PLEDGES TO ACTION: AMPLIFYING ENERGY
TRANSITION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SIDS”

FRIDAY, 13 JANUARY 2023; 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM
ROOM A1, ST. REGIS HOTEL, SAADIYAT ISLAND, ABU DHABI
STATEMENT

HON. SIAOSI ‘OFAKIVAHAFOLAU SOVALENI (HON. HU‘AKAVAMEILIKU)
PRIME MINISTER
HIS MAJESTY’S GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA
&
PRESIDENT OF THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE SIDS DOCK ASSEMBLY

His Excellency, President Surangel Whipps, Jr. of Palau;

H.E. Ishmael Kalsakau, Prime Minister of Vanuatu;

H.E. Reem Al Hashimy, Minister of State for International Cooperation, United Arab Emirates;

Mr. Francesco La Camera, Director General of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA);

My fellow Heads of State and Government and Distinguished Ministers from IRENA Member countries, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.
Mr. Chairman,

It is a great honour for me to speak at this significant gathering on behalf of His Majesty, King Tupou VI, and the government and people of the Kingdom of Tonga.

It is also my further honour, to express the delight of my delegation and myself, on the warm and welcoming atmosphere, and we therefore express our gratitude to the Government of the United Arab Emirates, for their gracious hospitality since our arrival.

We can all agree that the deserved applause and praise for the moving poem on the energy transition in SIDS, eloquently delivered by Ms. Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner of the Marshall Islands, accurately captured our true dilemma. Some of us across the SIDS have seen Ms. Jetnil-Kijiner grow up before our eyes, never wavering in her convictions, and at the forefront of the climate change war, fighting for SIDS survival.

This heartfelt performance from Ms. Jetnil-Kijiner, and her personal pleas over the years, for the world to act on climate change, has always brought the room to their feet. This occasion is no different.

Mr. Chairman,
I would like to thank Mr. La Camera, the Director-General for IRENA, and his staff, for all their hard work in staging the thirteenth session of the IRENA Assembly, and for providing an agenda item that recognises SIDS special case and our special development needs, particularly for the development and deployment of small- and medium scale SIDS-Appropriate Technologies, if we are to have any chance of amplifying our energy transition for sustainable development.

We meet at a time of profound change where the world is in the midst of a continuing global energy crisis, with impacts that will be felt for years to come, in terms of lost development gains. More than any other group of countries, Small Island Development States (SIDS) are less competitive because we have some of the highest energy prices in the world, that threatens our national energy security, food and water security, and places pressure on our populations as they try to cope with the increasing cost of living.

For the people of SIDS, the heaviest burden falls on our poorer households. A larger share of their income is spent on energy and food, and many of these households are headed by women; this means that there is a significant percentage of the population without access to electricity, mostly due to affordability. The danger we now face, is that this heavy burden placed on our people through no fault of their own, may force them to return to reliance on firewood for cooking, instead of cleaner and healthier solutions.
SIDS are running out of space for solar farms. Our economies will never be competitive with intermittent sources of energy such as wind and solar. Most of us are islands, thriving on corals and volcanic materials from millennia, with not enough biomass on land to generate sufficient energy. However, we have one resource, our largest, and that is the ocean.

SIDS have particular needs and circumstances that are made more difficult by the negative effects of climate change, for example, severe occurrences like the COVID-19 epidemic, and for Tonga, the devastating volcanic eruption exactly one year ago, namely, the eruption of the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Haʻapai volcano on January 15th, 2022, that generated atmospheric shock waves, sonic booms, and tsunami waves that traveled the world. The U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Earth Observatory noted that the sheer power and savagery of the eruption was quickly apparent in satellite imagery.

And then, we have geopolitical challenges. What happens in Ukraine, affects Tonga. The old French saying that “when France sneezes, the whole of Europe catches a cold,” could be replaced by, “when the world sneezes, the whole of SIDS catches a cold,” only because we account for less than 1 percent of the world’s population and less than 1 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, and in the case of Tonga, with a population of approximately one hundred and seven thousand (107,000), Tonga’s gross domestic product represents less than 0.01 percent of the world economy.
Mr. Chairman,

SIDS have always come together, and setting the pace for our energy transitions is a collective race to resilience, a means to building back better, and we have taken responsibility for building our climate resilience and see the energy sector as the entry point as the promised funding from the international community has not materialized.

The Pacific SIDS have the highest ambitions under the 2015 Paris Agreement, but tiny compared to the rest of the world, due our small size. According to a 2021 International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) analysis, the Pacific Region’s first National Determined Contributions (NDC) showed that all 14 Pacific SIDS mentioned renewables, whilst 13 of the Pacific SIDS had quantified renewable energy targets in their NDCs that equated to 1.979 gigawatts (GW). A total of USD 5.2 billion will be needed by 2030 to implement these NDC renewable energy targets, of which 93 percent will be conditional that would need external investment.

There is also another part of the Paris Agreement pledge, which was supposed to be delivered by December 31, 2020, in the runup to COP 26 in Glasgow, Scotland, namely, the provision of raising USD 100 billion per year from 2020 onwards, to help the developing countries tackle climate change through mitigation and adaptation. This particular pledge has fallen behind, and did not reach its target by December 31. The UN’s
own analysis has only been able to track less than USD 80 billion being promised by the end of 2020.

There is another issue, besides that of the USD 100 billion, which is of great importance for the vulnerable developing countries like the SIDS: the proportion of the total amount being allocated to support adaptation in the most vulnerable developing countries and how that money is channeled. So far, the UN’s analysis shows that only twenty percent (20%) of the global funds are going towards adaptation, while eighty percent (80%) are going towards mitigation activities in the bigger developing countries. Mr. Chairman, SIDS are being left behind.

At the COP27, nations committed to working together globally to address the climate emergency affecting weaker countries like SIDS. They also recognised the urgency of taking immediate action to build infrastructure for resilience and get ready for the inevitable and escalating effects of climate change. As SIDS, we urgently need more measures and assistance in our rapidly changing environment especially with resilience infrastructure, stable and smarter grid, battery storage, sustainable transport, decentralised systems, and more focus on energy efficiency.

Mr. Chairman,

We have limited resources, yet, SIDS have demonstrated tremendous ambition and persistence as seen by our ambitious NDCs, and national
energy targets. The demand to accelerate implementation as a result of the transfer of clean sound technology, financial resources, and the development of local capability is crucial. However, this is only possible if SIDS, development partners, financial institutions, and all other relevant parties collaborate to strengthen functional partnerships to provide the right and specialized energy transition solutions.

The Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation, and the S.A.M.O.A. Pathway, are just a few of the frameworks available to the SIDS as a means to implementation. Over the years, they have helped to define our clean transition and have become a crucial component of IRENA’s work, which led to the establishment of the SIDS Lighthouses Initiative. SIDS have been fortunate to benefit from IRENA’s capacity building, technical assistance, project facilitation, access to funding, energy planning, and support for NDC implementation.

It is in this context that Tonga welcomes the support of the World Green Economy Organization (WGEO), a comprehensive response to calls by the international community for a holistic approach to spur progress on how and why a green economy is the world’s best route towards a safe and prosperous future. We applaud His Excellency Saeed Mohammed Al Tayer, Chairman of The World Green Economy Organization (WGEO). His Excellency Mr. Al Tayer has over thirty-five (35) years of combined expertise in the fields of industry, energy, water, infrastructure, and telecommunications, and the remarkable successes he has attained in
establishing a number of prosperous businesses, can only bring success to the WGEO in meeting its goals and attaining its mission. Tonga is very much interested in learning more about the benefits available to SIDS through the WGEO, from capacity building to technical and funding assistance, to information exchange and lessons learned on the green economy, and we hope to enter into dialogue on these matters.

Mr. Chairman,

We were also very pleased with the announcement made Her Excellency Dr. Nawal Al-Hosany, Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, during her remarks delivered at the SIDS DOCK Side Event, held on the margins of the UNFCCC COP 26 in Glasgow, in November 2021, where SIDS DOCK and our partners introduced the Global Ocean Energy Alliance (GLOEA). Her Excellency Dr. Al-Hosany noted the launch of the UAE-IRENA USD 400 million global climate finance facility, the Energy Transition Accelerator Financing (ETAF) Platform that will, for the first time, include financing for ocean energy, and where in 2023, the UAE will host the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 28), scheduled for 30th November to 12th December 2023. SIDS DOCK hopes to showcase support for the first ocean energy projects.
The SIDS intend to showcase our indicative project pipeline comprising ocean energy projects that involve the development and deployment of thermal, wave, tidal and other technologies, developed specifically for SIDS, and we are doing this through public-private partnerships.

To further support the commercialization of ocean energy technologies, as President of SIDS DOCK, last year, during the sixth session of the SIDS DOCK Assembly in September 2022, I launched the President’s Personal Initiative (2022-2023): Commercial-Scale Deployment Of Ocean-Based And Waste-To-Energy SIDS-Appropriate Technologies, primarily to help accelerate the transfer of Ocean Energy Technologies and Small- and Medium-scale Waste-to-Energy (WtE) Technologies to Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and to help raise awareness among the Heads of State and Government of SIDS that are members of both the SIDS DOCK, the Sustainable Energy and Climate Resilience Organisation, and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the advocacy and negotiating voice for SIDS through the United Nations system.

So far, we have been able to identify a group of dedicated private sector partners, who are currently working with us through partnership agreements with our governments, and they have developed SIDS-Appropriate Technologies and getting ready to deploy them as commercial demonstration pilots.
Mr. Chairman,

We must thank IRENA for their continuous support, because now more than ever, the SIDS need support to help take advantage of their largest renewable source of energy – the ocean. SIDS’s energy markets remain small, and require greater attention. The current energy crisis serves to act as a reminder of the fragility and instability of our current energy system. According to the IRENA, forty (40) SIDS have filed NDCs, and thirty-two (32) of those SIDS have specified quantifiable renewable energy targets totalling 11.9 gigawatts (GW) of installed renewable energy capacity.

This capacity is anticipated to assist the SIDS in contributing to the transition to the global one point five degrees Celsius (1.5°C) target. Currently, we have only achieved 6.5 gigawatts (GW) of total installed capacity. It is therefore necessary to expedite meeting these obligations in order to lower costs and increase the use of renewable energy sources, particularly battery storage. A more robust regulatory environment, plus increased financial support and a dynamic market policy framework are required to provide the essential help in a timely manner.

Mr. Chairman,

In the preparation for COP 28, which will be hosted by the United Arab Emirates, the 13th session the IRENA Assembly and this event focused
on SIDS energy transition, provides a dress rehearsal and an important platform to provide our partners, donors and supporters with information about our plans and programmes for our energy transition. This event can also help us formulate our call for actions, further emphasise the need for international cooperation, but more importantly, identify partners and ways to access climate finance so that we get the needed financial support on the ground to the most vulnerable communities, and aid in the transformation of SIDS economies into resilient, safe environments for their citizens.

As we look to the fourth Conference on SIDS, scheduled for 2024 in Antigua and Barbuda, let us ponder the words of Ms. Jetnil-Kijiner, both past and present. Our Children are watching, and waiting. They are facing an uncertain future if action is not taken now to help build SIDS resilience to the severe impacts of climate change, sea level rise and ocean acidification. If not, the Children of SIDS will be left behind. They also voiced their right to be included in the development agenda and emphasised their important role in helping to build climate resilience in SIDS. So, as we head to Antigua and Barbuda in 2024 for the 4th Conference on SIDS, we must be mindful to place the Children of SIDS at the top of our agenda.

Mr. Chairman,
Through your invitation, you have helped elevate our causes. We are very pleased that IRENA will be including ocean energy in its work programme. To Mr. La Camera, your support for the SIDS community is evident, your commitments solid. For this, we say thank you, to you and your staff, and we hope that you will put the full weight of IRENA beside the SIDS, and support us as we look to the ocean as a major part of our energy mix.

In closing, I wish for IRENA a very successful 13th Assembly, and once again, thank the Government of the United Arab Emirates for being such an outstanding and supportive host.

Thank you and Malo ‘aupito.