KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

DINNER EVENT IN THE MARGINS OF THE FIFTH ENERGY &
TRANSPORT PACIFIC MINISTERS’ MEETING

“INTERNATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY AGENCY (IRENA) & THE
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE): EMPOWERING LIVES AND
LIVELIHOODS IN SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES:
RENEWABLES FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION”

THURSDAY, 11 MAY 2023
WARWICK LE LAGON
PORT VILA, VANUATU
KEYNOTE ADDRESS
HON. SIAOSI ‘OFAKIVAHAFOLAU SOVALENI
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His Excellency, Honorable, Ralph Regenvanu, Minister of Climate Change Adaptation, Meteorology & Geo-Hazards, Energy, Environment and Disaster Risk Management,

Dr Stuart Minchin, Director-General of the Pacific Community,

Mr. Gurbuz Gonul, Director of the IRENA’s Country Engagement and Partnerships.

My fellow Heads of State and Government, Distinguished Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a distinct honour for me, on behalf of His Majesty’s Government and the people of the Kingdom of Tonga, and in my capacity as President of the sixth session of the SIDS DOCK Assembly, to deliver the keynote address in the margins of the Fifth Pacific Energy and Transport
Ministers’ Meeting, in Port Vila, Vanuatu, and to have the opportunity to contribute to the discussions regarding the Pacific’s priorities in strengthening the energy and transport sector, and across all sectors including the agri-food and health sectors.

We meet at a pivotal moment when the world is experiencing a genuine global energy crisis, with repercussions that will last for years. Small Island Development States (SIDS) are hampered by the high energy prices that affect our country's energy security, raise living expenses, and have an impact on food insecurity, with the brunt of the burden falling on poorer households where a larger proportion of income is spent on energy and food. The small island nations’ rising electricity prices are anticipated to make it harder for households to afford them and result in a rise in the number of individuals without access to electricity. In place of cleaner, healthier alternatives, we worry that our people would be forced back to using firewood for cooking.

SIDS have unique demands and conditions that are made more difficult by the negative consequences of climate change, extreme events like the COVID-19 outbreak, major natural disasters like the Tonga Hunga Haapai and Hunga Tonga volcano eruption, and geopolitical difficulties. Our commitment and tenacity, however, continue to lead the pace for
meeting our own climate change, Sustainable Development Goals, and national energy targets. We as SIDS should be proud of this.

Additionally, Tonga is proud to be home to the Pacific Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (PCREEE) and the newly launched SPC Polynesian Sub-regional Office in Nuku'alofa, both of which are playing an important role in assisting the Pacific Community and us in completing our energy transition. These efforts are made possible by our partners and kind and generous donors.

Ladies and Gentlemen

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.

If we are to seriously address our energy, food and water nexus, we must diversify our energy mix - solar will not be enough, even with distributed
systems. Our small islands are all severely land-stressed, and we are encouraging our people to turn to invest resources in other resource such as Ocean energy.

Pacific Island People are “Ocean People,” the ocean is our lifeblood and livelihood. Tonga’s rise from the ashes of the January 2022 volcanic eruption received wide regional, inter-regional and international support, but it was the strong support from our fellow SIDS that was critical in lifting our spirits. These challenges and the ever-present danger of changing climate showed us that if we are to have any chance for survival, we must turn to the Ocean to help solve some of these challenges and to Build Back Better.

Over the ensuing decades, the SIDS must replace more than ten thousand megawatts (10,000 MW) of fossil fuel-powered electrical producing facilities, facilities that use more than five billion dollars' worth of fuel yearly. The worrying part is that these 10,000 megawatts are the majority of the current producing capacity in the SIDS.

If we are able, over the next decade, to replace half on this capacity, approximately five thousand megawatts (5,000 MWs) with ocean energy systems, and operating at the same level of availability as the diesel units, the SIDS would reduce diesel imports by more than seven (7) million
barrels of fuel, per year, at one hundred and twenty dollars ($120) per barrel. We could potentially see an improvement in SIDS’ trade balance, of more than eight hundred and forty ($840) million dollars, per year.

Ladies and Gentlemen

When it comes to financing our energy transition, our experience has shown that Public-Private Partnerships work, and that SIDS can benefit from innovative private sector lead projects, supported by governments. Tonga is taking the lead along with our fellow SIDS in driving the sustainable Blue Economy, partnering with private companies to collaborate and innovate on some of the most challenging water and ocean issues.

In June 2022, in the margins of the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon, Portugal, I had the honour to launch the Global Ocean Energy Alliance – the GLOEA, supported by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the Global Network of Sustainable Energy Centres - the GN-SEC, and other partners. The GLOEA is considered the most important sustainable energy and climate resilience initiative created by SIDS, since the idea for the SIDS DOCK organization to promote collective action.
The GLOEA is part of my personal initiative as the President of SIDS DOCK, called the President’s Personal Initiative for the Commercial-Scale Deployment of Ocean-based, SIDS-Appropriate Technologies. We believe we are making the right move, for the right people, at the right time, and we are pursuing our goal of commercializing ocean energy technologies for deployment to provide the foundation for our future generations to survive and thrive. I therefore invite the meeting to visit the GLOEA Website, a project in development, where you can find more information at gloea.org. We welcome your feedback as we continue to work on GLOEA’s development which we intend to showcase at COP28.

Tonga has begun discussions with several private sector companies and has already signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the development of a Pilot two-megawatt (2MW) Wave Power Park, that has the potential to displace two (2) million liters of diesel fuel, annually, saving Tonga two million United States dollars (USD 2 million) in foreign exchange, and providing clean power for approximately two thousand eight hundred (2,800) households. We are also exploring the development and deployment of a Floating Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC) Platform that would provide us with baseload power, 24/7, to complement the energy mix, especially solar, which provides intermittent power. The most positive thing about these partnerships is the structure under which
the Government of Tonga is not required to provide any financing, beyond in-kind support and the signing of a Power Purchase Agreement.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We have limited resources, yet, SIDS have demonstrated tremendous ambition and persistence as seen by our ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions, 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 partnerships that are functional in order to provide the right and specialised energy transition solutions.

We salute our kind and generous donors, our development partners and supporters who have provided financing for our energy transition and recognize the critical importance of maintaining and scaling up these partnerships. As we gather here today, I commend the IRENA SIDS Lighthouse and the Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), two outstanding PSIDS partners who are committed to helping us address the connected challenges within the energy, food, and water nexus.
Financing is critical to the implementation of our policies and by extension our projects, and we express our gratitude.

In January 2023, several of us traveled to Abu Dhabi, to participate at the Thirteenth Session of the IRENA Assembly. Through the SIDS Lighthouses Initiative, IRENA convened a SIDS Ministerial in the margins of the Thirteenth Session with the aim of engaging SIDS in providing progress on implementation of the SIDS Lighthouse Initiative, the AOSIS-IRENA Energy Compact, the objectives of the S.A.M.O.A Pathway, commitments and action towards the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals; and SIDS’ perspectives and insights leading up to COP28 for accelerating clean energy transition in small islands states.

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. This Side Event in Vanuatu is a demonstration of the continuity of IRENA and the SIDS Lighthouse’s strong commitment, and supported by the Government of the UAE, that has generously provided the SIDS with a space for debate at the upcoming COP28 in the UAE. Sustainable energy is critical to the strengthening of value chains across all sectors including the agri-food and health sectors,
and we believe that ocean energy – in all its forms, whether thermal or kinetic, can help to accelerate our energy transition.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to report that Tonga, in its capacity as President of the SIDS DOCK Assembly, is forging pathways under the SIDS DOCK/IRENA Memorandum of Understanding to accelerate our energy transition in the Pacific SIDS. Further, it is my honour to announce that SIDS DOCK and IRENA SIDS Lighthouse are working together in the facilitation of the development of bankable projects in PSIDS, as well as to provide support and avenues for accessing appropriate financing, and building national and regional capacity. IRENA and the UAE have pledged support to the PSIDS in our energy transition and the facilitation of developing bankable projects as well as accessing finance.

SIDS DOCK and IRENA are currently finalizing a work programme through 2026, and it is important that the PSIDS make significant progress in development of the regional project pipeline as we look forward to COP28 and beyond. I therefore encourage all PSIDS to contact the SIDS Lighthouse Initiative, those contacts my Office will share with you. The SIDS Lighthouse team at IRENA are poised to facilitate the SIDS energy transition, to help countries grapple with increased vulnerabilities and
critical needs to recover from shocks and develop in a sustainable, resilient manner.

We are all being crushed by rising energy prices that will not be retreating any time in the future, and the longer we delay the transitioning of our economies to low carbon economies, the more damage will be done to our economies and environment causing increased poverty and unemployment, wiping out the few gains left after being decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic. I therefore encourage all PSIDS to take advantage of this opportunity provided by IRENA, and you can also contact me directly, or your United Nations Ambassadors in New York, or any of your Energy Directors and SIDS DOCK National Coordinators in your countries for more information.

Through our MoU, IRENA will be able to serve not only IRENA and SIDS DOCK Members, but also SIDS Lighthouse Partners which includes territories. Therefore, I reiterate my call to all PSIDS to take full advantage of the technical assistance and support being provided by IRENA, as we work towards achieving our renewable energy goals in order to secure the lives and livelihoods of our people.

Ladies and Gentlemen
In closing, on behalf of His Majesty’s Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, and in my capacity as President of the SIDS DOCK Assembly, we reaffirm our commitment to working with IRENA and the SIDS Lighthouse and all our partners and donors in helping the PSIDS with their energy transition.

I wish to sincerely thank the Government of Vanuatu, our excellent host, for their warm welcome and all the hard work in hosting the Fifth Energy and Transport Pacific Ministers’ Meeting. I also wish to extend thanks to IRENA, and in particular to the SIDS Lighthouse, for recognizing and prioritising the critical importance of energy, health, food and water security, which are critical to our future livelihoods. Without a doubt, the immense support provided to the SIDS by the Government of the UAE has significantly contributed to helping us see a clear and supportive path that is leading us to COP28, where we hope to showcase the collective progress, we are making together, and attract other partners.

Thank you.