

Statement by Tuvalu

Delivered by

Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction

Chair

Thank you for the opportunity, and Tuvalu fully support the statement of Mauritius on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), and the statement by Marshall Islands on behalf of the Pacific Island Countries.

Tuvalu's would like also to express it sympathies to those countries that suffered severe damage and loss of life from the recent events in the Indian Ocean.

Chair

The Small Island Developing States in the Pacific acknowledge that many international declarations and development programs recognize the special circumstances of SIDS, their people, and their communities. From Agenda 21, for example, state that the human and social characteristics of small islands together with their vulnerability form a "special case" to be dealt with in global action programs. And of course most recently in the Mauritius Strategy for further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for SIDS.

The vulnerabilities of small islands have increased over the last decade whilst resilience has not kept pace. In an ever-globalizing world, the human and social characteristics continue to be dominated by growing exposure and vulnerability alongside increasing inabilities to respond. A major disadvantage is the small population base tending to lead to a narrow range of on-island resources and skills.

Yet given their size, small islands can be entirely devastated by a disaster, with the sustaining environment, social fabric and resulting livelihoods virtually destroyed. Decades of development effort can be eliminated in a few hours, as demonstrated in 2004 by Cyclone Heta in Niue in the Pacific.

Despite a strong understanding of the environment, many islanders often have little perception of increasing vulnerability, especially due to longer-term changes. People living on small islands perhaps generally understand their island, its characteristics and how to build resilience, yet do not have the adaptive capability or sufficient alternative options and resources to cope with significant environmental changes. Future implications are augmented vulnerability, less understanding of current and potential risks, and a growing inability to deal with these issues.

Chair,

Rising sea levels attributed to global warming and caused by increased global greenhouse gas emissions would make some small islands uninhabitable. This risk is considered unacceptable and it is a major concern to Tuvalu, especially since small islands communities are not responsible for the damaging emissions.

The prevalent and serious risks to Pacific SIDS island communities demand new solutions. Rather than ad-hoc activities linked to disaster response following specific events, as is often witnessed, these solutions must effectively address the underlying causes of the

vulnerabilities leading to disasters. Recovery and reconstruction from specific disasters, plus the loss of development opportunities, pose excessive costs. More proactive and comprehensive disaster reduction and risk management policies and programs must be considered.

The protection and promotion of traditional knowledge is especially important for building resilience and for reducing vulnerability. Many Pacific islands continue to use traditional agriculture to live with risk and to reduce vulnerability, even though some of the elements have been considerably modified. Because of changes to land tenure, consumer preferences, environmental conditions, and land use, few livelihoods are ~~exclusively~~ *now excluded* ~~subistence any longer~~. Nonetheless, non-commercial fishing, cultivation on individual plots, and animal husbandry form a large portion of the food supply for many islanders.

In conclusion, Tuvalu as other SIDS are very vulnerable to a wide variety of environmental and human-induced hazards. They often possess traditional or cultural resilience, yet vulnerability is increasing due to population growth, global environmental changes, and shifting social and political priorities. These factors magnify the challenges of isolation and highlight resource limitations of their small size, which are inescapable.

Tuvalu reaffirmed the need for a special case to be given to SIDS based upon their unique vulnerabilities and the fact that their vulnerabilities are increasing. In this context we acknowledge that last week in Mauritius, the international community, together with SIDS Leaders, agreed to the Mauritius Strategy for further implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for SIDS. We further acknowledge the important link between this strategy and the outcome document from this Conference in so far as securing support to reduce the impacts of disasters in the Pacific Region.

Thank you.