

Combatting climate change

By THE HON TUILAEPA LUPESOLIAI SAILELE MALIELEGAOI

PRIME MINISTER OF INDEPENDENT STATE OF SAMOA



TUILAEPA LUPESOLIAI SAILELE MALIELEGAOI holds an MSc in Commerce from the University of Auckland in New Zealand. He worked for the EEC and Coopers & Lybrand before being elected to the Samoan parliament in 1980. He served as Finance Minister during the early 1990s, becoming deputy Prime Minister in 1996. In 1998 he became the 6th Prime Minister of Samoa. He has successfully led his HRPP party to re-election in the 2001, 2006 and 2011 general elections.

Last year, in September 2014, Samoa was privileged to host the 3rd UN International Conference for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The theme of the Conference was ‘Genuine and Durable Partnerships’ vital to successfully addressing the challenges facing small island developing states in the Pacific, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and in other parts of the world’s oceans and seas.

As made abundantly clear in the SAMOA Pathway, the challenges are not few, and each small island state must address all these adequately, either individually or where necessary, as is often the case, through genuine and durable partnerships, if economic and social development is to be sustained going forward. A common denominator worry for all SIDS is climate change and its severe adverse impacts on sustainable development efforts. Without doubt, only partnerships will help SIDS on the climate change front, and nothing short of successful global collaboration to tackle climate change will provide the lasting solution that SIDS, and indeed the world, needs.

At the end of this past July, I was able to attend and speak at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Peace and Security challenges facing Small Islands Developing States. The catalogue of security threats SIDS face stemming from illegal drugs, firearms, people smuggling, financial crimes and illegal fishing, to name just a few was presented to the UNSC. All these require SIDS to work in close cooperation with international partners to find solutions, including cross-border actions, to successfully address these threats. As expected, Climate Change and its impacts that have already manifested and are projected to further impact SIDS occupied a major part of the special Security Council debate. It was heartening to note that the contributions at the debate by Security Council members, including those of the permanent five, and the Commonwealth countries that are currently members, reflected clearly the Council’s wider acceptance that Climate Change and its impacts present a very real security threat to SIDS. It was a point again emphasised by my other Pacific colleagues, specifically invited to the debate, the Premier of Niue and the President of Kiribati who spoke poignantly of the experience of his country and the threat to its very existence because of Climate Change.

Earlier this year, in the South Pacific, Vanuatu bore the brunt of Tropical Cyclone ‘Pam’ which caused widespread

destruction throughout the country. Other neighbouring Pacific nations including the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Kiribati also sustained extensive damage from the same system. Early in 2014, Tonga was struck by cyclone ‘Ian’. My own country was hit at the end of 2012 by cyclone ‘Evan’. The North Pacific island countries have similarly been struck by multiple cyclones in the last few years. The same pattern of devastating cyclones is also the experience of the Caribbean and Indian Ocean island countries. It seems clear to us that the frequency and severity of these events have increased markedly because of climate change. The cost to small island countries of the destruction from these events is immense, and the setback in economic development measured in years.

SIDS, including our Pacific islands have taken adaptation steps to reduce the impact of these severe events when they strike. We have also taken steps to address the other impacts of climate change, including sea level rises and droughts that put relentless pressure on fresh water supplies and eco-systems vital to the survival of species and for sustaining food chains. Small island states are also reducing further their carbon footprint to support in ‘word and in deed’ the global call for the reduction in Green House Gases emissions.

On both the adaptation and GHG mitigation fronts, the measures that SIDS need to undertake require a scale of resources for implementation that is only possible through effective partnerships. In my own country and the Pacific, examples of such effective partnerships promulgated within the countries of the region involving Commonwealth members include the Renewable Energy Partnership with New Zealand as a leading promoter and implementer, as well as comprehensive regional arrangements to respond rapidly and effectively when disasters strike through Australia’s leadership.

The Malta CHOGM takes place immediately before the COP21, where we all hope that a new treaty to halt climate change will be successfully concluded. For this to happen will need all states from the strongest and largest to the SIDS members to commit to an ambitious and universal agreement. Very importantly as well for SIDS is the deliverable goal of agreements on financing for adaptation and mitigation, technology development and transfer and capacity building to enable Pacific islands and SIDS to successfully respond to the impacts of Climate Change. I look forward to CHOGM conveying a similar message to the COP21.