



TUVALU

**Statement**

**Delivered by**  
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**Ambassador/Permanent Representative of Tuvalu to the United Nations**

**at the Alliance of Small Island States Conference**  
**on "The Human Dimension of Global Climate Change"**

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Mr Chairman  
Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me firstly join the previous speakers in commending and congratulating the Government of Maldives for hosting this important conference on this very beautiful island resort. The warm hospitality accorded to my delegation since our arrival is highly appreciated.

The Maldives has a long history in climate change negotiations and was instrumental in the formation of the Alliance of Small Island States. We share a strong sense of concern with the Maldives as we are both nations built on a series of coral atolls.

### **Challenges Faced by Tuvalu as a result of climate change**

As has been said many times in many forums, it is without doubt that as a small island developing State, Tuvalu is one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change. A coral atoll nation like Tuvalu is right on the edge of existence. Climate change could well push us over that edge.

Tuvalu is a series of nine small coral atolls spread over 750,000 square kilometres of the central Pacific. The total land surface of Tuvalu is only 26 sq kilometres and the highest point above sea level is around 4 meters.

Today, we are faced with a significant new threat created by human-induced climate change. Climate change affects us in many ways. The warming of the atmosphere through greenhouse gases is also causing the oceans to warm. Records show that sea surface temperatures have been increasing by 0.1 deg C per decade. Warmer oceans create serious problems.

Our islands are surrounded by coral reefs. Coral are vulnerable to heat stress. A mere 1 deg increase in average water temperature will cause coral reefs to die - a process known as coral bleaching. Tuvalu is experiencing a small amount of coral bleaching and this is expected to rise.

Coral reefs are also affected by ocean acidification. This is caused by increased levels of dissolved carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the water. Acid sea water causes coral reefs to weaken and become more vulnerable to severe weather events, like cyclones.

Coral reefs are our first line of defence against storm surges. If the coral dies off or is weakened we become more vulnerable to being hit by large waves during severe storms.

Coral reef bleaching also decreases the fish stocks - the principle source of protein for island communities like Tuvalu.

Warmer oceans also mean that bad weather events such as cyclones are being more severe. Scientists predict that tropical cyclone intensities could increase by 5 to 10 percent by the year 2020. Studies show that the number of category 4 and 5 storms has doubled from the period 1975-1989 to the period 1990-2004.

The thermal expansion of the ocean and the melting of polar ice caps and glaciers is also causing the sea to rise. Tuvalu being a low lying country is very vulnerable to impacts of sea level rise. Each year Tuvalu experiences large spring tides in February and March. When these large tides come, sea water rises up under some of the atolls and floods the land. From local accounts, this effect appears to be getting worse.

If one of these big tides occurred at the same time as a cyclone, it could spell a real disaster for Tuvalu. Overall climate change represents a threat to Tuvalu as a nation. One scientist at the University of the South Pacific has said that Tuvalu will be uninhabitable in the next 30-40 years as a result of climate change.

In this regard the theme of the meeting "The Human Dimension of Global Climate Change" is very pertinent. The survival of our nation, our culture, our people is threatened by climate change. This is not just an environmental issue, it is a human rights issue.

#### **Actions taken by Tuvalu to address these challenges**

Government has highlighted climate change as one of its priority cross-cutting issues in its National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2005-2015. Climate change has been integrated and mainstreamed in the development process of many sectors.

In particular, relevant legislations on the protection and conservation of the environment and our marine resources have been enacted and currently enforced. Government has also put in place strict policy on the importation of hazardous gases and other materials that may have an adverse impact on the environment.

Tuvalu has already formulated its National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) which highlights a number of projects required to be implemented urgently. At this stage the need to secure the required funds to finance such adaptation projects is critical. As a small island developing State with limited resources, Tuvalu depends very much on the financial and technical assistance from the International community

## **Views on the opportunities presented by the Bali Process**

At the United Nations earlier this year the government of Tuvalu set out a four step plan for how the Bali COP must respond. This included:

1. Reconfirming the role of the Kyoto Protocol: Industrialised countries must set new emissions reductions targets. We hope that key developed countries like the US and Australia will indicate that they will ratify the Protocol.
2. We must establish a process to amend the Protocol to allow newly industrialised countries (like South Korea) and countries with economies in transition to commit to emissions reductions targets.
3. We must establish a process to develop a new legal instrument under the Convention to allow developing countries to take on voluntary emissions reduction commitments. Incentive mechanisms would need to be developed to encourage voluntary commitments
4. We need to commit to a more comprehensive global framework on adaptation to the impacts of climate change. This would include new funding arrangements to help vulnerable countries build their resilience to the impacts of climate change. It would include a global insurance facility to assist impacted countries recover from the impacts.

Further to these points, we believe that there will be a process for considering the issue of reducing emissions from deforestation. Tuvalu has been very active in these discussions, not because we have a large amount of forests, but to ensure that any new arrangement will bring about real reductions in greenhouse gases. We do not want to create an opportunity for the industrialised countries to find a cheap way of offsetting their emissions and undermining the environmental integrity of the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol. Reducing emissions from deforestation could easily undermine the carbon market to reduce emissions in the major sectors, namely power generation, cement production and transport.

We, the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change, should encourage a very cautious approach to reducing emissions from deforestation. A failed market could set back global efforts to reduce all emissions in all sectors for many, many years. To ensure environmental integrity we SIDS should suggest that non-market approaches may be the best way forward to ensure that we do not undermine efforts to properly reduce emissions at the global level.

### **How these opportunities might best be siezed**

We must agree to a new negotiation process at Bali with a conclusion date of 2009. Getting agreement to do this will not be easy. Some countries in the G-77 and China will fight against any new agreement that may suggest commitments for developing countries. Oil producing countries will try and stop any new arrangement to increase the effort to address climate change. Therefore we as SIDS must join with other countries who want to move forward. We cannot have our hands tied by the G-77. We should join with Least Developed Countries and others to form a coalition of concerned countries to move the meeting forward to ensure we have an agreement to start negotiations.

We look forward to the discussions at this meeting.

I thank you.