

THIRD SESSION OF THE GLOBAL PLATFORM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

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STATEMENT DELIVERED ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT OF TONGA.

Madame Chair,

Firstly, I wish to congratulate you for chairing the third session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2011.

Madame Chair

I have the great honor to speak on behalf of the Government of Tonga in expressing our sincere appreciation to the President of the Swiss Confederation, Her Excellency, President Micheline Calmy-Rey and the people of Switzerland for their friendliness and warm hospitality.

Madame Chair,

The island Kingdom of Tonga which is situated in the central south Pacific is extremely vulnerable to the impacts of natural hazards, the climate induced hazards and geological hazards. The geographical location and geological composition of Tonga greatly determine its susceptibility to these impacts for they fundamentally affect the environment, the people of Tonga and their livelihoods. In addition, these impacts seriously affect sustainable development and also threaten the accomplishment of global, regional and national goals in relation to disaster risk reduction and disaster management. Scientific findings revealed that these impacts, particularly climate induced hazards, will be exacerbated by future climate change.

The Government of Tonga has made significant progress in addressing disaster risk management issues. It has considered these issues as highest priorities in its National Strategic Planning Framework 2009-2014. A National Disaster Fund was set up in June 2008 to facilitate post impact recovery process and the National Emergency Management Act was promulgated in 2007. In addition, awareness campaigns with stakeholders including government ministries, non government organizations, private sectors, academia, youth groups, women's groups, church leaders and members and also communities are part of an ongoing process of disaster risk management capacity building.

Madame Chair,

One of the key milestones and an important step forward for Tonga is the development of its Joint National Action Plan on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management. In Tonga, we have explored the linkages between climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. They both focus on the same underlying aim and that is to reduce vulnerability and risk and to enhance resilience to the impacts of climate change and natural hazards.

Tonga is the first country in the Pacific region to develop this joint plan and keen to be the first to fully implement this initiative. This plan is consistent with national, regional and international policy drivers, agreements and frameworks on climate change and disaster risk management, and specifically the Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Framework for Action 2005-2015 and the Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change 2006-2015. Tonga is pleased to have paved the way for other countries in the Pacific and also acknowledge that some countries in the Pacific are currently developing their Joint Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management Action Plan, including the Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia and Niue.

Madame Chair,

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, the National Emergency Management Office, and the national multi-disciplinary teams for climate change adaptation and disaster risk management played the key role in

developing this plan in Tonga. Special gratitude is offered to the Applied Geoscience & Technology Division (SOPAC) of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and also the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) joint team for providing professional and technical assistance throughout the development of this plan. Tonga is indeed fortunate to have experts in the country with the required skills and expertise to carry out this important task. This was a valuable exercise as it enhanced the technical capacities of the nationals. It also reduces Tonga's highly dependence on international consultants. Utilizing the resources already available in country and the organizations in the Pacific region to carry out this task is a cost –effective mechanism.

Consultative meetings with politicians, head of government ministries, non-government organizations, the private sectors and communities were conducted and strong support for the development of this plan was evident. Last year, 2010, Cabinet Ministers in Tonga approved this plan and the establishment of institutional framework and committees to coordinate the effective and timely implementation of this Plan.

This plan comprises six national and community priority goals and activities which are; improved good governance for climate change adaptation and disaster risk management, enhanced technical knowledge base, information, education and understanding of climate adaptation and disaster risk management, analysis and assessments of vulnerability to climate change impacts and disaster risks, enhanced community preparedness and resilience to impacts of all disasters, and building strong partnerships within government agencies and with non government organizations and civil societies. Further, different needs and contributions of women and men are recognized in this plan, however, to ensure that gender equality is considered when this plan is implemented, close collaboration with Ministry of Women Affairs and Community Groups are essential. The technical and financial assistance from UNISDR, UNDP and ONOCHA, are critical.

At the current stage, some donors and development partners have already committed funds to implement certain activities under this plan. Tonga indeed appreciates both current and future support from these respective agencies.

Madame Chair

In closing, I want to reiterate that we must ALL act now. Let us continuously share amongst ourselves the best practices for our success in doing things which help building our resilience to disaster risks. We must at all times be better prepared to adequately respond to impacts of all disasters. The need for close collaboration and strong partnerships within government and with non-government organizations and civil societies, not only at the national level but also at the regional and international level is crucial. The availability of appropriate technologies and sufficient financial resources will also be critical. These elements will assist us all in the promotion and achievement of nations and communities that are safe and resilient to disaster risks.

While Tonga has developed this joint National Action Plan to help reaffirm our commitment to resolving the important issues of vulnerability and risk, we also urge the global community to support our wider efforts in the Pacific to harmonise our regional policies for climate change adaptation and disaster risk management. We have started a move towards this end when the Pacific Climate Change Roundtable endorsed in March this year the integrated implementation of our respective frameworks for climate change and disaster risk management. In moving towards a singular framework however we need support at the global level. Hopefully, our experiences in the Pacific on this front can prove useful to other regions that may also consider going down the same road.

I thank you Madame Chair.

