



TUVALU

**Keynote Statement**

**Delivered by**

**the Prime Minister, the Honourable Enele S. Sopoaga**

**At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Summit of PIDF, Suva 2-4 September 2015**

***Summit Theme: “Building Climate Resilient Green Blue Pacific Economies”.***

***Keynote Speech Focus: “Challenges to Building Climate Change Resilient Economies”.***

Check against delivery

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen

It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to be given this opportunity to address this very august gathering.

At the outset I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the PIDF Secretariat, and the government and people of Fiji for hosting us in this beautiful city of Suva. Thank you also for the excellent arrangements and overwhelming hospitality that has been extended to us.

Let me also acknowledge with deep appreciation the kind offer by the Honourable Prime Minister Bainimarama to Tuvalu and Kiribati to settle their people in Fiji in case of submersion due to sea level rise. I want to assure the Prime Minister that Tuvalu has already taken up that offer by the number of Tuvaluan over-stayers – illegal migrants – already settling in Fiji.

I would also like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank and commend Prime Minister Bainimarama for his leadership and vision in nurturing this very unique and distinctive Forum. A distinctive character of the PIDF is its inclusiveness, and of course its boldness to deal with the development challenges confronting small developing Pacific Island states and territories<sup>1</sup>.

We are gathered here today to deliberate on matters so critical to our survival, in particular the impacts of climate change and sea-level rise, a life-threatening phenomenon already affecting us and with the potential to wipe out the most vulnerable countries from the face of this earth. Countries like Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands are said to be the first to perish, but I also believe that the same fate will befall on other low-lying islands, in fact all other countries and territories. Therefore it is extremely important that what would come out of this Summit should send a very clear, strong and united message to the world for strong leadership and solidarity against climate change. We all must work together, or we all perish altogether.

Allow me at this juncture to thank and commend the Summit organizers for the theme that has been chosen for this Summit which reads, ***“Building Climate Resilient Green Blue Pacific Economies”***. I agree fully that this theme is most befitting given the challenges and threats that climate change impacts now pose on our small and vulnerable island countries.

We have all witnessed a marked shift in weather patterns which has brought about much more frequent and stronger storms and cyclones, more regular and severe droughts, sizable sea-level rise and powerful surges causing havocs to lives and livelihood especially on low-lying islands. It is evident that climate change is here and we cannot afford to be complacent anymore. We, as rightly put by the Summit theme, must build our resilience to protect our lives, culture, our values and our environment, and save our people. This is simply our right to do so.

---

<sup>1</sup> Australia and New Zealand are although Pacific states they are seen by PIDF as development partners therefore their problems are way different from the rest which are all developing states. Article 7 of the Charter specifically list eligible members which obviously excludes Australia and New Zealand.

This morning I have been tasked to talk about the **‘Challenges to Building Climate Resilient Green Blue Pacific Economies’**. It is an honour to be given this chance to speak.

I wish to begin by recalling my visit to our outer islands in Tuvalu soon after devastations caused by Tropical Cyclone Pam where some of the islands were completely inundated by storm surge. While visiting one of the kindergarten schools there, a young school girl stood up and asked me, ‘Prime Minister please, is our future safe given what has just happened? What future do we have in you, Mr Prime Minister, as the leader of Tuvalu.

Not only emotional, but this is a very potent question. In fact I believe, this is the very premise on which to set the pace and momentum of this session as well as the whole summit. The little girl’s question is not about the science, is it true these disasters are climate change, nor about the economics, what is the cost of these damages? It is in fact a testimony of the fear of insecurity, the lack of confidence, the uncertainty of life, of survival in her own home in Tuvalu.

The question, moreover, is also a challenge that should be raised to all of us in this room, Pacific leaders, to world leaders in Governments, businesses, and Civil Society to seriously consider and address climate change. What future do we want for our children, for our youth. Addressing Climate Change is not about the science, not about the economics, its not about politics. It is about protecting and saving the lives of fellow human beings, our own people. Whether or not it is science, people’s lives in Tuvalu and the Pacific are already threatened, we are losing our islands, culture, and sovereignty. Indeed I was lost for words in reply. I believe this is the first and foremost challenge we should be reminded of, if we are to effectively build climate resilient economies.

TC Pam hit us on the eve of our general elections in March 2015, and the formation of our new Government. Though Tuvalu received only its peripheries as the eye hit Vanuatu, they left the Tuvalu islands seriously devastated. Fully conscious disasters of this nature will hit us again and again, Tuvalu has decided to carry out a whole lot of activities of response to build up its resilience to climate change impacts, and especially to protect and prepare better in the future. Climate change accelerated disasters are a mass weaponry attacking the security and survival of human beings, mankind.

A Tuvalu TC Pam report which includes a Resilience Building Plan has been launched and unanimously endorsed by the Parliament, and a HLD was recently held in Tuvalu on the report with development partners, UN agencies and friends. The Government has established a Survival Fund, as a mechanism to develop partnerships of resilience.

The resilience plan will focus on immediate relief for the affected communities, short-term rehabilitation, and long-term responses like building seawalls all around the main settlements, strengthening governance, legislation, agriculture, and the provision of food security and health services. We need to emphasise capacity building through quality education and training, and technology development. The Survival Fund will also leverage access to, and we are already seeking assistance through various climate change funds and any interested donor for assistance. The best and strongest seawall design should also be identified to ensure that it lasts.

In terms of food security, we are also going to need alternative methods to sustain our root crops such taro and *pulaka* which have been damaged by saltwater intrusion. Hydroponics or improved varieties of crops are others which can all be considered to improve our resilience.

In terms of water, improved water harvesting and in particular, increasing water storage capacities would be of high priority to safeguard the population against droughts. Works on solar electrification with support from the New Zealand, European Union, the UAE and others are all on going on some of the islands. Assistance is still needed on the last few islands.

TC Pam taught a clear lesson, that the costs of climate damage is very high and will continue to rise, and ODA alone will not be sufficient to help us cope. We clearly need a regional loss and damage mechanism to help us cover the cost of rehabilitation, recovery and compensation after these events. It is critical that we seek for the establishment of such a facility.

For COP21 in Paris end of the year we as Pacific Leaders must have courage to stand up tall to speak up so the voice of our little ones is heard and amplified loud and clear. In the SDG summit in NY, we must do the same – for what is the point of talking about sustainable development targets, when lives of people and their survival, are seriously compromised by impacts of climate change. We cannot allow the deniers of climate change impose their will on us and rob our children of the future they deserve to enjoy. And despite our Christian upbringing to forgive sinners, we cannot allow the sinners destroy our lives and future.

COP21 agreement must be bold, far-sighted, and decisive to ensure the security and survival of our people. We must take the leading role in defining the outcome of climate change negotiations, for a global pact to address climate change without fear, without favour, to save our people, our home, our planet.

COP21 Agreement must be legally binding, and must also pave a clear, time-bound, and verifiable roadmap to comprehensively shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy base economies, including strong outcomes of loss and damage, compensation, capacity building, and technology development and transfer. It must also include clear frameworks on financing for mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, coordination and implementation.

Everyone must do their utmost to reduce the production of renewable energy and replace the highly polluting fossil fuels. The Paris Agreement must deliver real and substantial commitments to address climate change. On our part, Tuvalu and many PICs under the Majuro Declaration and have committed to reducing our use of petroleum and shifting to renewables.

The key focus of climate resilience efforts is to address the vulnerability that communities, states, and countries currently have with regards to the environmental consequences of climate change. Currently, climate resilience efforts encompass social, economic, technological, and political strategies that are being implemented at all scales of society.

There is indeed a long list of work and activities to be carried out to improve our resilience but would be difficult because we lack the resources and the technical capacities to do so. This is where we require friends and partners to enable us to effectively build climate resilient green blue economies. Without partners it would certainly be difficult for us and I

believe that through the efforts of PIDF we would be able to identify partners and friends who can assist.

Last but not least, it was also during that visit to our islands soon after TC Pam that I gathered a strong and challenging message from my people stating, ***'Whatever the cost, we shall never leave our islands and homes. Our ancestors were bred, lived and buried right here so shall we'***. I would like to strongly echo this again to all of us here with a pledge that we must work together to save our beloved peoples and islands.

If we save Tuvalu, we save the Pacific islands, and we save the Planet, our home. Thank you.