



TUVALU

Statement

Delivered by

His Excellency Mr. Afelee F Pita

Ambassador/Permanent Representative of Tuvalu to the United Nations

at

**The General Assembly Plenary on the Resolution on
“Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications”**

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*Permanent Mission of Tuvalu to the United Nations
800 Second Avenue Suit #400D
New York, NY 10017
Tel: 1-212-490 0534
Fax: 1-212- 810 4435*

Mr. President,

Today has special meaning for the Pacific Small Islands Developing States (PSIDS) and for Tuvalu, as it is the first time in the history of the United Nations for this august body to consider a resolution on climate change and its possible security implications. I am honored therefore to speak on behalf of the Government of Tuvalu in fully supporting the PSIDS resolution.

At the outset, Tuvalu wishes to align itself with the PSIDS statement delivered by the distinguished Permanent Representative of the Republic of Nauru to the United Nations and Chair of the PSIDS. We also wish to convey our sincere thanks to all Member States who have willingly supported and co-sponsored our resolution. The adoption of our resolution by consensus today is a milestone and clear testimony that climate change is a global phenomenon that undoubtedly has security implications affecting all countries, especially the most vulnerable small island States like Tuvalu.

Mr. President, climate change is certainly the most serious threat to global security and the survival of humankind. In particular, it is an issue of enormous concern to a highly vulnerable small island State and low-lying atoll nation like Tuvalu, which resides right at the edge of existence. Climate change is a matter of life and death and certainly is a security issue from our perspective; one that could well push us over that edge.

Mr. President, the people of Tuvalu recently celebrated their 30th year of independence. While we are a very young country, we are a very old society, stretching back more than three thousand years. We have thrived primarily on subsistence fishing and farming, and while our traditional way of life has kept our families fed for many generations, it has never been tested by a crisis as large as the one presented by climate change. Tuvalu is not a contributor to the root cause of climate change, yet its people must bear the adverse impacts of a crisis caused by the actions of other countries.

Mr. President, the low-lying islands of Tuvalu are extremely vulnerable to sea-level rise. The highest point on any of Tuvalu's islands sits at no more than five meters above sea level, with most of the islands at less than three meters. Recent research forecasts sea level to rise by as much as a meter or more by the end of this century. Such a development would be truly catastrophic for Tuvalu, but even a fraction of that level will lead to considerable hardship and suffering.

Sea-level rise is also threatening our water security, as saltwater contaminates our limited supply of groundwater, which is critical for maintaining public health and sanitation, as well as for growing our food. The increased salinity has destroyed many of our traditional pulaka pit gardens and is forcing us to adopt more salt-resistant crops.

Climate change also threatens the abundant coral reefs that surround Tuvalu and support our subsistence fishing activities. Rising ocean temperatures can cause bleaching events, leaving a reef lifeless.

Carbon dioxide emissions are also changing the chemistry of the oceans. In a more acidic ocean, corals find it increasingly difficult to form their exoskeletons and are more vulnerable to disease, parasites, and predators. Taken together, coral bleaching and ocean acidification place a significant portion of Tuvalu's food supply in jeopardy. Signs of reef failure in Tuvalu are

already abundant and fish populations around coral reefs have experienced a significant drop in number.

Mr. President, this resolution comes at a critical time. Scientists tell us that we can still avoid the worst effects of climate change, but that strong action must be taken now. It is therefore paramount that the international community honor its commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which were reaffirmed in the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and again under the Mauritius Strategy.

Climate change is a serious and destabilizing force that threatens the security of Tuvalu and every other Member State. The early effects are being felt most acutely within the borders of poor countries, but they will soon spill over into nearby countries as their neighbors run out of food and clean water. Tuvaluans have been among the first to taste the destructive potential of climate change, but we will not be the last. It is for this reason that Tuvalu is urging the Security Council and other relevant organs of the United Nations to treat this issue with the urgency that a security threat of this magnitude deserves.

I thank you.