TUVALU GOVERNMENT

Tuvalu Statement
by the Honourable Enele S Sopoaga
Prime Minister
at the High Level Segment of the 28th Session of the UNHRC
Geneva 5-6 March 2015.

Excellencies,

The dangerous impacts of climate change on humankind are already happening. Throughout the whole world, there is evidence of untold and unprecedented destructions threatening livelihoods and attacking the very fabrics of existence for millions of citizens around the world. They attack the basic rights of people, communities, and whole nations to live, to be human beings.

For Tuvalu, an island atoll nation in the Pacific, the situation is extremely serious. The rights of our people to develop, to food, and to enjoy a secure and decent life are seriously compromised by the impacts of climate change. Every single day a child is asking its mum: is there a future for me. We must save Tuvalu, the world.

Mr President, it is timely that this Session of the UN Human Rights Council is focussing its attention on the implications of adverse impacts of climate change on human rights. While we applaud the leadership, it has to be noted that the situation on the ground is dire: requiring not further reporting and assessment,
but URGENT CONCRETE ACTIONS to protect, to recover, rebuild, adapt and to ensure the fundamental rights of those most vulnerable are protected.

Tuvalu believes the outcome of this exercise cannot be simply re-iterations and reaffirmations of the rehtorics made and heard so many times. It must help craft and project a way forward based not on saving economies, but on saving human beings, saving the human race, saving vulnerable islands like Tuvalu.

The science (the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report 2007) and economics (Sir Nicholas Stern Report 2007) of climate change are unequivocally clear: the impacts will be catastrophic. And these have been again re-underscored in the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment report - Tuvalu and small islands like it will be severely devastated, possibly totally submerged within the next 50/100 years or so, unless URGRENT and AMBITIOUS action are taken by all, NOW.

The UNHRC must seriously consider an appropriate human response to human rights implications of the impacts of climate change in line with the objective of and the principles enshrined in the UNFCCC.

The impacts of climate change for Tuvalu include the loss of coastal land and infrastructure due to erosion, inundation, sea-level rise and storm surges; an increase in the frequency and severity of cyclones, creating risks to life, health and homes; loss of coral reefs. The loss of coral reefs due to bleaching and ocean acidification has significant food security implications. Changes in weather patterns due to climate change will also threaten fresh water supplies; and create salt-water intrusion into agricultural land; and extreme temperatures
Mr President, there is a fundamental justice concern here which is exacerbated by the fact that climate change will strain the ability of many states, especially the poorest among them, like Tuvalu, to uphold their human rights obligations. In our first UPR report of 2009 to this very body, we had pointed this out clearly.

Moreover, climate change also poses an effective obstacle to the continued progress of human rights. It will worsen the existing inequities that afflict a world already riven with inequality, poverty and conflict. We do not have the resources nor the capacity to cope with these impacts.

The impacts of climate change also interact with several global mega-trends, such as population growth, human mobility, urbanization, as well as food, water and energy insecurity. Climate change acts as an impact multiplier and accelerator.

Displacement is likely to be a significant consequence of global climate change processes of both a rapid and slow-onset events. There is a potential that at least some of Tuvalu’s population will be displaced by the impacts of climate change. In saying this, the legal principle of continuity of statehood is important. Our basic rights to survive as a sovereignty is critical and must be protected.

It is also our view that any future relocation must ensure the enjoyment of the full range of relevant rights to enjoy and practice one’s own culture and traditions and to continue to exercise economic rights in their areas or countries of origin. Responses need to be guided by the fundamental principles of
humanity, human dignity, human rights and international cooperation, and by consent, empowerment, participation and partnership.

Tuvalu also believes that responding to the human rights implications of climate change can be best addressed primarily through two institutional frameworks:

- The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; and
- The UN Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR)

With respect to the UNFCCC it is critical that the global agreement on climate change to be adopted in Paris in December, must adopt urgent and ambitious mitigation actions to reduce GHG emissions, concrete adaptation actions, as well as strong provisions on loss and damage including compensation for human rights infringements. We must not be any lesser ambitious.

The UN Human Rights Council on the other hand, should be mandated with preparing a report on measures and best practices to promote and protect human rights as a consequence of climate change. It should develop a legal instrument to address the situations of people internally and externally displaced by the impacts of climate change. The HRC and OHCHR should be mandated with the responsibility of identifying ways to enhance the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights with respect to the protection of human rights associated with the impacts of climate change.

Tuvalu is happy to expand further on these proposals at the roundtable meeting scheduled for this Session later in the week.