



SOLOMON ISLANDS

**STATEMENT BY THE
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MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & EXTERNAL TRADE
OF SOLOMON ISLANDS**

**AT THE OPENING OF THE 74TH SESSION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

*On the theme “galvanizing multilateral efforts for
poverty eradication, quality education,
Climate action and inclusion”*

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Mr. President,

The Government and People of Solomon Islands join me in congratulating you, on your election as President of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Your wealth of experience will serve this organization well, as you lead us through our agenda. Let me assure you of Solomon Islands support and cooperation during your tenure in office.

Let me also use this opportunity to express my gratitude to your predecessor, Her Excellency Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, for her sterling leadership and stewardship over the past year and I wish her every success in her future endeavours.

Mr. President

If there ever was a time when enhancement of the work of our United Nations is needed, that time is now. The many challenges we face require collective effort and solidarity for progressive action going forward. Our aspirations for peace and well-being to live in dignity rests on the strength of multilateralism. The theme "Galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion", is both fitting and timely.

As we prepare to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the existence of our organization, let us use a re-invigorated United Nations to provide the platform upon which we, the Leaders, can confront the many challenges and issues we face today and long into future. This requires collective action.

Mr. President

We must not allow the United Nations to be undermined by unilateral actions of some. The UN was set up for all. It provides a platform for global discussions. It unites and promote our common strengths in addressing complex challenges facing our countries.

Over the last forty-one years, our relationship with the United Nations has been managed externally from the UN's Fiji office. We reiterate our call for the UN to move away from your 'business-as-usual approach' and build a stronger country presence. We do not accept the outcome of the multi-country office assessment which recommended the retention of the current arrangement.

Solomon Islands is a post-conflict country. Its population is estimated to surpass that of Fiji by the early 1930s. It deserves to have its own country office.

Climate Action

Mr. President,

Climate change and natural disasters are impacting all our countries. Our oceans are warming. Sea-levels are rising. Extreme weather events such as tropical cyclones, hurricanes, flooding, drought and king tides are becoming more intense. They are inflicting more damage and destruction to communities and ecosystems. They put people's lives at risk.

In this regard, my government expresses our sincere condolences to the government and the people of Bahamas for the destruction caused and lives lost in the recent Hurricane Dorian. We are steadfast in our support to and solidarity with the government and people of Bahamas as they embark on the long recovery process ahead.

Mr. President,

The Pacific island countries and the Caribbean island countries are and will always be at the forefront of climatic events, generated through the changing global climate systems.

The visit by the Secretary General to the Pacific earlier this year highlights the gravity of climate change facing small island states. Within the 75 years history of the United Nations, His Excellency Antonio Guterres is the second Secretary General to visit the Pacific Islands.

It also demonstrates the Secretary General's personal commitment to better understand the plight of Pacific people in their struggle against climate change. It helped the Secretary General see and understand that climate change is a matter of life and death for Pacific people.

The impact of climate change is well documented. However, it is important to remind this audience of a few.

- by 2030, it is estimated that 90% of our coral reefs will be bleached - thereby threatening food security, fisheries and livelihood of our people.
- There will be more frequent, severe weather events leading to destruction of property and loss of lives
- The economic costs resulting from severe weather events in smaller island states are beyond the capacity of each country to address or respond to.

It is also important to reflect on the impact of climate change to date.

- Solomon Islands is experiencing the impact of climate change three times the global average.
- Sea level rise is happening at a pace where we continue to lose islands.
- Ongoing resettlement of internally displaced populations is now a new normal. We remain in an endless state of recovering from slow onset events, especially by populations living on low lying islands.

Mr President,

Considering these events, I and my government wish to again convey our sincere appreciation to the Secretary General for gracing our region with his visit which demonstrated to us that he cares.

There is no room for cynicism and complacency. We need urgent and collective climate action

The Kainaki II Declaration adopted by Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum last month in Tuvalu, reaffirmed climate change as the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of our peoples.

We commend the UN Secretary General's Climate Action Summit that was convened this week. However, we are disappointed on the lack of political will by those with the means of implementation to present more ambitious commitments that will put us on a below 1.5°C pathway. Under the current circumstances we are heading towards a 3°C world. The science is clear and non-negotiable. We must ensure our policies and actions are guided by science.

Solomon Islands has embarked on an exciting journey to further reduce its carbon footprint. In 2024 we will commission our first 15 mega-watt Hydropower project. The project will reduce fossil fuel consumption by 70 percent which is equivalent to

50,600 tons of Carbon Dioxide Greenhouse Gas emissions. This is more than twice our commitment under our submitted National Determined Contributions. We continue to make the call for international partnership in meeting our conditional emission reduction targets of 45 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050.

Maritime, Ocean and Fisheries

Mr. President,

We rely on our oceans for our livelihood. Much of our economy is linked to our oceans including in tourism, fisheries and transportation. Our oceans are an essential part of our culture, gastronomy and leisure. Our identity as Islanders is inextricably linked to the ocean – it defines who we are. As an Ocean state we are committed to strengthening the management, use and conservation of our oceans, including the high seas.

It is no secret that our ocean is the last remaining rich fishing ground in the world. Our region supplies more than 60% of world's tuna. It is in our collective interest and our shared responsibility to have a healthy ocean with a healthy tuna stock to ensure we have sustained supplies of tuna for current and future generations.

Our regional institutions, the Forum Fisheries Agency located in our Capital city and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community continue to assist our island countries manage the tuna resources of our member states, worth over USD 3 billion dollars annually. This annual catch generates USD535 million dollars for the region and contributes more than USD400 million to the region's GDP. Despite this, the distant water fishing nations still get the largest benefits from the tuna industry.

Solomon Islands, tuna catch in our waters last year amounted to 124,724 tonnes. 24,000 tons are processed for consumption by our local company Soltuna Limited. The export of processed tuna generated an average annual export value of USD59 million and provides 2000 jobs.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is undermining our tuna management system. We have put in place mechanisms including, the Niue Treaty Subsidiary Agreement and the Vessel Day Scheme (VDS) as a deterrence management system.

IUU fishing in the Western Central Pacific region has an estimated value of USD600 million with an estimated direct economic loss of around USD 150 million for Island countries

We call on distant water fishing nations to eliminate IUU fishing, and to ensure ocean states receive full benefits from the resources within their jurisdiction.

Mr. President,

The Pacific Small Islands Developing States is in one of the largest oceans in the world with an estimated total area of more than 36 million square kilometres. Solomon Islands Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) amounts to 1.4 million square kilometres of sea compared to a land area of 28,466 square km (10,938 square miles). Solomon Islands has developed a national ocean policy, to manage all issues relating to the oceans.

I am pleased to note that our joint tripartite submission for Extended Continental Shelf (Ontong Java Plateau) between Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and the Federated States of Micronesia was successful, and we thank the Commission on the Limits of Continental Shelf for its positive consideration of our joint submission.

The future Biodiversity Beyond areas of National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) instrument is currently being negotiated. We anticipate a fair, equitable, inclusive outcome that addresses our specific needs to support us in the implementation of our obligations and rights under UNCLOS. We hope to incorporate traditional knowledge systems that complement science in the new BBNJ instrument. My government is committed to working with others towards concluding the BBNJ negotiations by 2020.

Peace and Security

Mr. President,

The UN was born out of the ashes of WWII. The UN Charter compels us to uphold peaceful co-existence amongst and within and between nations through use of intensive, sustained and inclusive dialogue to resolve our differences and conflicts. Peace is not just about the absence of war. It's also about the absence of hunger and access to the basic necessities of life, so that all can live their lives to the fullest. Access to finance, particularly for the most marginalized and vulnerable, is one of those basic necessities of modern-day life.

These basic rights remain a challenge in my country with a narrow base economy and an increasingly huge youth bulge comprising 18,000 new jobseekers every year that are competing for jobs in a job market that can only provide about 3,000 new jobs each year. Job security is key to long-term peace and security in a post-conflict country, Solomon Islands

Mr. President,

While facing its own challenges, Solomon Islands is proud to have contributed 12 police officers to the United Nations African Mission in Darfur, Sudan. We stand ready to deploy more officers for UN peacekeeping duties in other UN peacekeeping missions. As a beneficiary of the peacekeeping -Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands over the last 14 years, we know what it means to reciprocate the type of assistance our people have benefited from.

I must also register my country's deep gratitude to the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund, for their continued support to our people. Three of our provincial governments have received programme, policy and budgetary support from the Commission.

Mr. President,

On Security Council reform, Solomon Islands would like to see the Council become more representative, relevant and effective in keeping up with today's realities. In this regard we call for a non-permanent seat in the Council explicitly for Small Islands Developing States.

Solomon Islands reaffirms its continuing commitment towards maintaining the nuclear free Pacific, through the Rarotonga Treaty. We reiterate our call for the total elimination of nuclear weapons by all nuclear weapon states, including those holding onto all forms of weapons of mass destruction. We would also like to see a world free of weapons of mass destruction.

Solomon Islands will spare no effort in seeking the full implementation of all relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

Poverty Eradication

Mr. President,

The World Social Summit identified poverty eradication as a moral, ethical, social, political and economic imperative of mankind. We support the call for governments to address the root causes of poverty, provide for basic needs for all and ensure that the poor have access to productive resources, including credit, education and training.

Responding to the need to support financing of rural development, the government in 2018 passed the Development Bank of Solomon Islands (DBSI) Act 2018 to reestablish the DBSI. The Bank will facilitate the economic and social development of Solomon Islands within the government's national development Strategy. The emphasis will be on the participation of Solomon Islanders in economic development as well as stimulating industrial activities.

Mr. President,

My government has also doubled the basic minimum wage in the country from August this year to increase the purchasing capacity of workers to cope with the high cost of food, electricity, rent, transport and school fees. We will also review our personal tax exemption threshold for workers.

Attention is being paid on how the most vulnerable can benefit from rapid technological developments and interconnectivity. Our Undersea Cable that will link Honiara to Sydney is a critical transformative infrastructure that will bring the government closer to its people. The submarine cable will be commissioned and go live in December this year. I thank the Government of Australia – the main financier of this transformative project.

The Solomon Islands government has embarked on an ambitious and transformative infrastructure development agenda called the National Transport Core (NTC) that aims to connect all of the 50 constituencies in our 10 provinces and 100% of our population within 15 years. The first phase of this transformative infrastructure program that involves building of roads, bridges, ports, airports and procurement of well-designed ferries aim to connect 37 constituencies and 75% of our population in the first 10 years.

The government is also exploring other innovative modes of revenue and partnerships as we look to transform our country's development.

Solomon Islands is scheduled to graduate from the Least Developed Category (LDC) category of countries in December 2024, after meeting two of the three criteria for graduation.

While accepting that we need to graduate, I must emphasize that we did not pass the vulnerability criterion, which should have been the most important of the three criteria. As witnessed from several superstorms that had hit small islands states lately, the gains by each state can be reversed within a matter of hours. We look forward to further discussing these matters in the upcoming visit of the UN agencies in mid-October to assist us in developing a practical smooth transition strategy.

Mr. President,

Solomon Islands subscribe to Istanbul Programme of Action, the SAMOA Pathway and the Sustainable Development Goals. I am happy to state that the goals, targets and

indicators in these three global mechanisms have been mainstreamed into our 2016 – 2035 National development Strategy (NDS).

Incorporating all three global frameworks with our NDS will ensure we not only achieve the respective targets of the three global frameworks, it will ensure we will also achieve the vision underpinning our National Development Strategy of - *'Improving the Social and Economic Livelihoods of all Solomon Islanders'*.

Solomon Islands will be presenting its Voluntary National Review of the SDG in July 2020.

Quality Education

Mr. President,

Solomon Islands has the fastest population growth rate in the Pacific with fifty children born every day, an equivalent to two classrooms every day. By 2050 it is projected we will have almost eighty (80) children born every day, an equivalent to 3 classrooms every day, or a new combined primary and high school every week.

We are reforming our education system to accommodate this added pressure with an increased focus on technical and vocational education and life skills education.

We are also creating an inventory of all youths in the country with the view to have a ready pool of young people for employment opportunities inside and outside Solomon Islands and for further training opportunities.

I acknowledge with appreciation the tremendous support provided by Australia and New Zealand for employment opportunities for young Solomon Islanders in both countries.

Health access and NCDs

Mr. President,

While accepting that Climate Change is the most important challenge that needs to be addressed by all countries and especially Pacific Island countries, I must also register my governments concern that the single largest killer of our people today, in virtually all our countries is Non-Communicable Diseases. I also concerned that not nearly as much attention is accorded to halting and reversing the NCD epidemic.

In Solomon Islands 7 deaths out of every 10 are due to NCDs. In some other Pacific countries, it is as high as 8 deaths out of 10 deaths. Malaria adds to the challenge.

I am happy to inform this body that my government has developed and is implementing a Roadmap to Eliminate Malaria by 2030. We are also developing a Roadmap to halt and reverse the NCD epidemic in Solomon Islands.

We are also exploring alternative modalities of treatment for some forms of NCDs, particularly plant-based pharmaceuticals that are affordable and can be produced in country. Solomon Islands is working with Cuba to further explore opportunities in this area.

However, my key message to this august body, is that hundreds of thousands of people are dying every day due to NCDs and diseases such as malaria. We must therefore step up the urgency to fight and reverse the NCD epidemic.

Human Rights

Mr. President,

On human rights, Solomon Islands is preparing its third Universal Periodic Review, and will ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability during this session.

On West Papua Solomon Islands aligns itself with the Pacific Islands Forum position. We reaffirm Indonesia's sovereignty over Papua. We remain concerned on the escalation of violence and the continued allegation of human rights abuse reported in West Papua. We welcome the invitation by Indonesia for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit and conduct an independent assessment of human rights in West Papua. We encourage both parties to agree on a date to carry out such a visit as soon as possible to ensure the outcome is available as soon as possible.

Solomon Islands thanks Cuba for the training of its medical students, with more than eighty Solomon Islands medical doctors having graduated from Cuban medical schools. We note the 59-year-old economic embargo imposed on Cuba remains in place. Solomon Islands calls for the lifting of the embargo placed on Cuba. We encourage the restoration of good relations between Cuba and the United States in the name of peace, and within the spirit and purposes of the United Nations Charter.

Other Matters

Mr. President,

My country has made a commitment to host the 2023 Pacific Games that will bring together all 24 countries and territories of the Pacific. I am pleased to note the support we are receiving from traditional and non-traditional development partners in preparing our country for the games. In particular, I acknowledge our immediate neighbours Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. We are also making outreach to other partners whom we hope will respond positively to our 2023 Games proposals.

I also wish to announce to this Assembly that Solomon Islands has begun reviewing its foreign policy. In doing so we have recognized the one China policy in compliance with UN resolution 2758 and have formalized our relations with the People's Republic of China. We are also broadening our engagements with all countries in keeping with our policy of "Friends to all, enemies to none".

Conclusion

Mr. President,

Coming back to the theme for the 74th Session of the General Assembly of Galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion, Solomon Islands see value in and believe that we can achieve many things through strategic partnerships and meaningful multilateral and bilateral engagements among and between countries.

I commend the Secretary General for theme. It has provided a basis for self-reflection for many countries.

From the Pacific context our ocean is the single largest shared resource we have and one where meaningful multilateral and bilateral efforts can unlock untold development opportunities. Protecting our ocean is protecting our future.

The UN negotiations on climate change must be done with haste. We must go from rhetoric to real progress – to ensure our children and future generation live their lives to the fullest.

The NCD crises must be halted and reversed. For some countries, their future can be undermined by the NCD epidemic. This is a more urgent challenge right now than climate change in my view

The great French writer Victor Hugo used to say, "There is nothing as powerful as an idea whose time has come." The fight against climate change and NCDs, I submit, are ideas whose time have come. Let's do that now and be on the right side of history. Thank you, Mr. President.