

ON MINISTERIAL LETTERHEAD

STATEMENT OF HON. SEMISI KIOA LAFU SIKA
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
MINISTER OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND TOURISM
AT THE GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
UNITED NATIONS, WEDNESDAY, 17TH JULY 2019

Check Against Delivery

Madam President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to be back at the United Nations to participate at this year's High-Level Political Forum marking the end of the first four-year cycle since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. This year also marks the first time the Kingdom of Tonga has presented its Voluntary National Review report together with a record number of other small island developing States from the Pacific region.

Madam President,

We thank the Secretary-General for his report which reviewed the progress of implementing the 2030 Agenda. We associate ourselves with the respective statements by the Chairs of the Group of 77 and China, AOSIS and the Pacific SIDS.

Madam President,

This year's theme reflects the very nature of the SDGs which serve to empower our people equally in an inclusive way. The Government of the Kingdom of Tonga domesticated and integrated the SDGs and the SAMOA Pathway in its second Strategic Development Framework. While progress has been made, more needs to be done to fully meet the goals and targets.

Madam President

Allow me to comment on the SDGs under review and Tonga's progress thereon:

On SDG 4, Tonga's Education Act makes education for children from ages 4 to 18 compulsory. Government high schools have been established in all island divisions and Government primary education is available free of charge. The World Bank Skills and Employment for Tongans or SET

project enables students from low-income families and remote locations to access secondary and tertiary level studies.

On SDG8, Tonga became a member of the ILO in 2016 and, in embracing the 4 pillars of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, continues efforts toward ratification of the ILO's conventions.

On SDG10, Tonga addresses its limited economic opportunities through ongoing engagement in the seasonal work programs in partnership with Australia and New Zealand which have recently expanded from horticulture and viticulture skills to include semi-skilled work such as care services, carpentry and hospitality.

In relation to SDG13, Tonga is a pioneer in integrating management of both disaster risks and impacts of climate change and has launched its second Joint National Action Plan in 2018. A Climate Change Trust Fund was established in 2017 to support the climate resilience needs of the most vulnerable sectors and communities.

On SDG16, Tonga has seen the appointment of its first Tongan Supreme Court Justice and its first female Magistrate, both in 2018. Significant strides have also been made in improving relevant infrastructure and strengthening governance institutions.

Madam President,

Several initiatives such as the national planning, budgeting and statistical systems are critical for translating plans to results. We note the value of

genuine collaboration and multi-stakeholder engagement in effectively mobilizing resources and therefore strengthening our means of implementation.

Madam President,

Let me conclude by saying, that the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga is committed to continuing with a whole-of-government approach to ensure the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. To this end, we seek the ongoing support of the collective UN system in strengthening bilateral and multilateral partnerships to empower our people and ensure inclusiveness and equality.

I thank you.