

**TUVALU STATEMENT BY THE RT. HON. SIR TOARIPI LAUTI, PRIME MINISTERIAL
SPECIAL ENVOY ON CLIMATE CHANGE OF TUVALU. UNFCCC COP3, 1-10 December
1997, Kyoto, Japan.**

Mr President,

I extend to you, your Government and the People of Japan, as well as to distinguished delegates here in this august gathering, Christmas Greetings and Best Wishes for a fruitful New Year from the Government and People of Tuvalu.

Through you Sir, let me also convey our warm and sincere thanks and appreciation to the Government and People of Japan and in particular the People of Kyoto Prefecture for their kind and warm hospitality to us all.

Mr President, Honourable Leaders of Delegations, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

There is an asserted consensus that binding significant targets to reduce greenhouse gases are essential, if the catastrophic impacts of climate change on the livelihood and existence of people are to be limited. Our mere presence here in Kyoto this week manifests this belief. For the people of low-lying small island states of the world, however, and certainly of my small island country of Tuvalu in the Pacific, this is no longer a debatable argument. The impacts of global warming on our islands are real, and are already threatening our very survival and existence. The security of our future and that of our children and grandchildren is indeed at stake.

It is therefore essential and imperative that this Conference in Kyoto takes into account the plight already faced by the people of Tuvalu and those of similarly low lying small island States, within the final negotiated text of the Protocol. As is well known, Mr.

President, Tuvalu is one of the smallest island states on earth with all the characteristics of smallness i.e. low-lying, isolated, geographically fragmented and extremely vulnerable to external forces including climate change impacts.

The vulnerability and fragility of Tuvalu's ecological system and its proneness to climate change effects is well documented. Mr. President, a 1996 assessment of climate change impacts and adaptation carried out for Tuvalu by the Environment Agency of Japan and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), convincingly concluded that, I quote, "...because of its location and physical nature, Tuvalu is particularly susceptible to the adverse impacts of climate change and in particular rising sea level."...Unquote. This conclusion spells it all out, and is consistent with the findings highlighted in the second assessment report of the IPCC. Added to which is the conclusion from many scientific studies that coral reef islands like my very own, will be uninhabitable when sea level rises as a result of global warming and climate change.

Mr President, empirically, these findings have very close correlations with what Tuvalu and many in the Pacific have actually and physically experienced and suffered as a result of climate change, especially strong winds and sea level rise. We are already experiencing increased frequency of cyclones, tornadoes, flooding, and tide surges many of which unexpectedly hit us outside the usual climatic seasons of the islands. This year alone in 1997, Tuvalu was devastated by three tropical cyclones; the first two in March -Gavin and Hina-, and more recently Keli.

The cost of these effects to us in Tuvalu is enormous. It is almost unbearable. Not only were houses and whole villages damaged, but also vegetation and food crops were completely destroyed. In one recent incident an entire island community were left

homeless and its vegetation damaged so much so that the island is uninhabitable right now. In another incident, one whole islet completely disappeared into thin air. Erosion to coastal areas of our already scarce land is further worsened, and the increased salinity in underground water is seriously affecting not only vegetation and traditional food crops but also the health and lives of the people.

Mr. President, clearly while Parties to the UNFCCC here in Kyoto debate over what emission reductions to take, Tuvalu continues to bear and suffer the increasing cost of climate change impacts which is threatening the very existence, culture and unique identity of Tuvalu as a member of the global community. Mr. President, there is nowhere else on earth that can substitute for our God given homeland in Tuvalu. The option of re-location as mooted by some countries therefore is utterly insensitive and irresponsible.

My Delegation fully appreciates the high costs to developed countries of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to acceptable levels. Indeed coming from a small island state already suffering from the effects of climate change, we are trying to understand the rationality of lack of actions to implement commitments made in Rio five years ago. However, we also wish to remind the Conference that the costs of not doing something to that effect, urgently now, are even much higher. To us in Tuvalu it is certainly not a question of economics and costs. It is a matter of life and death. Ignoring our pleas will amount to nothing less than denial of our rights to exist as part of the global society and of the human race.

We therefore humbly call upon all Annex 1 countries to make a firm and significant commitment to emission reductions. Given their capacities and indeed their contributions so far to global warming, they should take the first steps to reduce

greenhouse gases. Developed countries should also recognise the importance of setting strong QELROS targets in their efforts to curb the negative impacts of Climate Change. Many proposals have been discussed here in Kyoto and again I plea to those countries in Annex 1 to seriously consider the vulnerability and plight of the small island states as advocated by the AOSIS and as evidenced by physical climatic destruction the world over.

Mr. President, we firmly believe that various measures and discounting strategies proposed at this Conference such as: the net approach; emissions trading; differentiation; joint implementation; and the promotion of sinks will not adequately address the immediate need to reduce emissions and curb climate change impacts. Further delays of the proposed target over the years will only bring forward the negative effects of Climate Change, which are already evident in our part of the world.

We further ask all Annex I countries to carefully reconsider their efforts to incorporate a least cost approach to resolving climate change. For Tuvalu and small island states, this inevitably results in a high cost approach. Minimising costs will delay preventative actions to reduce the rate of global warming.

We agree that advanced developing countries emissions are set to contribute to the global problem of climate change in the very near future. However, we think it is important that Annex 1 countries should agree to legally binding commitments now and that advanced developing countries follow on emission reductions thereafter.

Mr. President, Kyoto must turn a page of new hopes as we look forward to the future. The success, or failure, of COP3 hinges on Annex 1 countries taking this very important first step.

Mr. President, before leaving Tuvalu my grandchildren asked me why I was coming to Kyoto and whether I would be bringing back presents for their Christmas. I am more than sure that the whole world, including our children and grandchildren, is watching closely the outcomes of Kyoto. Is it going to be a "new beginning" of committed human solidarity to arrest and resurrect the risky situation faced by many disadvantaged small island states? Or is it going to be a hopeless outcome no one wants to remember Kyoto by. Let me plead again that the best Christmas present I can take back from Kyoto is not chocolates or lollies, but the assurance from parties here, especially developed countries, that their hesitation in action to cut down significant emissions will safeguard the continued security and survival of our children and their children in the future, in Tuvalu and the world over.

Thank you. Mr. President..