

SAMOA



United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
Conference of the Parties
Third Session
Kyoto, Japan

Statement by

THE HONOURABLE TUALA SALE TAGALOA
Minister of Lands, Surveys and Environment

ON BEHALF OF THE

ALLIANCE OF SMALL ISLAND STATES
(AOSIS)

Monday, 8 December 1997

Mr President,

Samoa is deeply honoured to be speaking with the strength of thirty five voices, on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). We represent almost a fifth of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Mr President,

I have but five minutes to remind all those participating in this Conference of some of the realities of climate change. These are present realities, which we, in the small islands are experiencing. Acting alone we are powerless to safeguard the future of our peoples from a problem they had no part in creating.

The Parties gathered here, aside from representing the interests of their own citizens, are under a moral imperative to act decisively now for **our** peoples, to give them the sense that they have a future, one of hope rather than of despair. No party should contemplate the loss of whole societies with indifference.

This Conference is a milestone in our concerted effort to determine a strengthened response to the global threat posed by climate change. No other single contemporary environmental issue deserves a higher level of international commitment. And yet, where is the leadership to forge and direct that commitment? Where is the humble assumption of responsibility? Sadly, it appears that at this moment both are absent.

Mr President,

Kyoto offers a vital opportunity which must be seized, one that we have been working towards for at least a decade. It is no exaggeration to say that the lives of future generations will be directly affected by the decisions we take this week. Quite simply, these decisions must advance the agreed objective of the Convention. Are we sure that what is "on the table" does that? Have we honestly prepared a text which reduces the risk of climate change for the most vulnerable members of international society?

We, the small island developing states, are the first to be affected by the consequences of climate change and the least able to adapt. Sea-level rise poses the most profound danger. It erodes already scarce land-territory, threatens our reefs and invades precious ground water.

And we are not alone, for the dangers posed by sea-level rise are shared by many countries throughout the world. But we are the indicators of what is likely to happen to others. Nor are we alone in accepting the current reality of climate change. We refer Parties to the work of the insurance industry, who are concerned about their own exposure to risk and whose existing data

demonstrating increased storm activity and intensity makes island communities uninsurable for climate-related risks.

Mr President,

The threat that confronts small island states contravenes fundamental principles of fairness and equity – it offends against the sovereignty of the state, the integrity of peoples and the right to life of individuals. Our people, faced with further inaction in Kyoto, fear leaving behind their islands, their unique environments and cultures, to become refugees. We all know, that it would be wrong to let this happen.

It is important to recall our mandate from Berlin. We agreed that the commitments undertaken at Rio by the Annex I countries must be strengthened. We did so conscious that the current loose Annex I obligations in Article 4.2 were inadequate. Only **legally binding, measurable commitments, properly enforced** will help us meet the objective of the Convention.

We understand that in the end we all must be judged against the criteria of environmental, economic and political credibility. Current proposed Annex I targets do not pass this credibility test. Clear and demanding targets agreed by Governments will encourage the innovation and technological shift that we need in order to make progress. Knowing that developed country societies will benefit from such change along with us makes it all the more frustrating to see so little will from them to commit to immediate and significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr President,

We believe strongly that Annex I targets must be dictated by the scientific consensus represented by the IPCC reports. The protection of the global commons requires it. Annex I targets must not be determined exclusively by reference to domestic cost calculations designed to cater to the special interests of declining industries. To see only cost and not investment in the future is a failure of imagination. We, by our efforts here can encourage new enterprises to develop bringing greener technologies, conserving energy, and generating power from renewable energy sources.

Let us not lose sight of the essential elements of a just and effective agreement to combat global warming - the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, the need for precautionary measures in the face of scientific uncertainties and the need for positive policies and measures to promote sustainable development. All this is already agreed, as is the clear Convention commitment to assist countries such as ours to meet the costs of adapting to the adverse effects of climate change. The Protocol we agree here must provide for:

- strong short-term and medium-term targets for all Annex I Parties, towards meeting the objective of the Convention;

- an effective compliance regime, which is compulsory and binding, and rigorous enough to identify and respond to those who are not meeting their obligations;
- a mechanism for early review of the adequacy of commitments;
- financial and technical support for the clean growth of developing countries.

What the Protocol should not do is to allow for any loopholes or “hot air”; or to leave any fundamental issues for the fourth session of this Conference.

Mr President,

The science is overwhelming, the consequences of inaction are clear, and success in Kyoto must be measured against the objective of the Convention. There is no future in prevarication. AOSIS, gathering together what remains of our optimism, intends to conclude these negotiations with a meaningful agreement. We retain a semblance of hope that in the final moments of these negotiations we are able to construct a Protocol which meet the needs of our island people. Our future represents the future of the planet – we are your coral reefs – your early warning signal which only the negligent would ignore.