

**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF TUVALU
THE RT. HONOURABLE BIKENIBEU PAENIU AT COP 4,
BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA 12TH NOVEMBER, 1998**

Madam President; Your Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am once again very privileged to address this gathering of the international community, at this 4th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. I speak to you today for my own country. At the same time it is my pleasure and honour to represent the Smaller Island States of the South Pacific Forum namely the Cook Islands; the Republic of the Marshall Islands; the Republic of Nauru and Niue who had appointed me as their Spokesperson for this particular meeting.

We are gathered here in this beautiful city of Buenos Aires, over the last two weeks, as "Partners with a common objective" of trying to agree on measures that will combat the devastating phenomenon of climate change. It is now over 6 years since the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was opened for signature at the Rio de Janeiro Summit of World Leaders in June 1992. It took another two years for the Convention to come in to force in 1994. And now in 1998, we are still talking. We are still negotiating merely because a minority group of the Parties to the Convention will not accept a sense of responsibility.

We all know that the results of our negotiations, so far, remain far from achieving our common objective. Although, the Kyoto Protocol was hailed as a major step forward in the global effort to combat climate change, it still falls far short of setting meaningful commitments for Annex 1 countries or developed countries that would closely reflect their true capacity to reduce their emission levels. Even before the Kyoto Protocol comes into force, this Conference of the Parties is already engaged in extensive negotiations on mechanisms that may further weaken and thus truly camouflage the obligations of developed countries to reduce their domestic emission levels. I am referring here, Madam President, to the flexible mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol namely emission trading; clean development mechanism and joint implementation.

During this conference we have witnessed an attempt by some Annex 1 countries to off load their responsibilities onto the developing countries. Some developing countries may be enticed by short-term financial gains. But this is not the answer! Planting trees is not going to stop global warming. This simply means that the flexible mechanisms we have been trying to establish will not save us from the devastating effects of climate change. The Annex 1 countries must not be allowed to sell off their responsibilities on cheap and easy to do projects in developing countries. They have not only a conventional obligation but also a moral obligation to take action at home. No more, no less.

This, Madam President, does not project a very promising scenario nor does it reflect a genuine attempt on the part of the developed countries in the global effort to combat climate change. Distinguished delegates, it is high time that we must cut the rhetoric and all the talking. What we have been doing up to now is more or less inventing processes that will never achieve our common objective. We must demand firm domestic actions, that is, real and positive actions within the borders of the developed countries and where possible also, new commitments from the developing countries. This is what I meant when I referred earlier to all of us as "partners with a common objective". I genuinely believe that collectively, with the genuine political will and commitments, especially from the developed countries, we shall achieve our common objective.

Although, it is the responsibility of all Parties to combat global warming, obviously, the developed countries with the capacity must demonstrate the leadership role in this imperative process and must physically reduce now. They must also assist the developing countries through technology transfer to enable developing countries to also play their role in combating climate change. Without the firm commitments by the developed world to honour their legal obligations under the Convention, and their early implementation Madam President, the devastating effects of climate change will continue to plague the life of millions of people. We do not have to look far from Buenos Aires for evidence. Just a week or

so ago, we witnessed the devastating aftermath of hurricane Mitch which swept through Central America and the Caribbean leaving thousands of people dead and homeless in its wake. The physical impacts of climate change on our lives have been repeatedly told time and again to the world, ever since 1990. I need not remind the developed world of the physical geography of our countries. The facts about our God given homelands are well known to the world. We are the most vulnerable of the most 'vulnerable countries'. I need not remind the Conference that the whole issue of climate change to us, is not economics and politics, but is of life and death.

We have suffered very badly. In our part of the world, the adverse effects of climate change have increased in magnitude as well as becoming more a regular part of our daily lives. We are spending millions of dollars to rehabilitate the devastation caused by the adverse effects of climate change, money, which should have been better, spent in educating our children and delivering a better health system to combat our high infant mortality rate. It seems to me, Madam President, that the international community would require us to prove to them that climate change is adversely affecting us and what impacts it might have on our economies and what steps can be taken by us before they might consider to act. This is arrogance at its worst. We are not where we are because of our own doing. We are where we are because of the excessive consumption needs and greed of the developed and more powerful countries. They, the developed countries, must accept their responsibility and take the consequences of their actions on others more seriously.

Madam President; this is unfortunately the difficult predicament that we have, without our own doing, been placed at. Yet, we in the low lying atoll nations of this universe have lived in conformity with our prevailing ecosystems. It is because of the excessive consumption patterns of the industrialised countries that have landed us in this predicament. Unfortunately, again it is not within our capacity to get us out of this situation. So much is dependent on measures and actions within the borders of developed countries that will determine our fate.

Amidst all these talks and negotiations, I wonder whether the developed world is seriously taking into account our fate. It seems to me Madam President that the processes and hence the end results emanating so far out of this Convention reflects very much the syndrome of imperialism which many in the developing world regard as evil. Yet, imperialism as it now revolves around the Convention is not only 'western imperialism' but is imperialism also across many countries in the Group 77. The developed countries are succeeding in dividing the developing countries so they continue to rule us.

We can actually make this Convention work in accordance with its protocol provided we in the developing countries are united in all our positions. I need not remind us of our colonial past. Not all of our colonial history is bad, but we have learned our lessons from the evils of colonialism. We the developing countries are allowing ourselves to be re-colonised by the developed world. Our sovereignty are being compromised and so as our human dignity. We are all striving to succeed economically and there are many other ways of achieving this objective but NOT by way of emission trading; clean development mechanism and joint implementation. What we need is for the developed countries to reduce emissions at home, and they must start now!

So it is my plea to the developed countries to take a more responsible and humane stand. You have reached the pinnacle of your might and power and likewise you have all the resources to turn greener and become less greedy for materialism. I plea that you physically take action to reduce now and allow us to continue to live in harmony and in cooperation with nature on our God given lands. You cannot simply continue to shy away from your responsibility whilst we continue to live through the consequences of your actions.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, we must have firm actions and commitments from the developed countries now. Tomorrow may be never for some. In that connection, I am pleased to announce that I would be signing and ratifying the Kyoto Protocol next week on my way home from this conference. The smaller island states, on whose behalf I represent this morning, are already taking immediate action to ratify the Kyoto Protocol as well. This is a further demonstration of our commitment to this process.