



Samoa National Statement

by

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Minister of Agriculture & Fisheries**

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Honourable Chairman,
Distinguished Ministerial colleagues,
Director General of FAO,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Samoa is grateful to the Royal Government of Bhutan for hosting the 35th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific, which is the first ever virtual regional meeting of FAO.

This is our "new normal" especially during these uncertain and unprecedented times due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has become the single greatest threat to global public health and economic growth.

To member states that have been affected by the pandemic and have lost loved ones in the process, please accept Samoa's sincere sympathies and profound condolences.

Honourable Chairman,

Our development strategy is grounded on genuine partnerships with our stakeholders and development partners to help achieve our agriculture and fisheries sector objectives of enhanced food security and nutrition, increased import substitution and export market opportunities for our people's well-being and economic prosperity.

Our land and the surrounding ocean are important natural resources for our overall development, and we are committed to utilize them effectively and sustainably, as part of our economic recovery in the current unpredictable COVID-19 environment, as tourism and remittances, important drivers of our economy, had been impacted negatively and severely by the pandemic.

In our recently presented Second Voluntary National Review report on the implementation of the SDGs, we worked closely with FAO on some of the key indicators. Our report highlighted that for SDG 2 on "Zero Hunger" overall, there is low level of extreme hunger and undernourishment in Samoa, but nutrition security is a concern. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of all Samoan households in 2015 engaged in some level of agriculture activity, and we reported an increase in agriculture's share of government expenditures and improved agriculture productivity including a growing proportion of small scale farmers engaging in sustainable organic and also commercial farming. But we still have a long way to go, and COVID19 has impacted some of our hard fought gains.

Honourable Chairman,

I want to highlight some key issues Samoa is facing in relation to food security and nutrition, and climate change.

Food is an important part of the Samoan culture with ties to our land and ocean and is key to our people's cultural identity. Yet, we face real challenges due to dietary changes and our high dependence on food imports. The reliance on imported food coupled with our people's increased consumption of processed, high calorie, high sodium and low nutrient content foods, have contributed to the increased level of health risks associated with non-communicable diseases.

To address this trend, Samoa promotes the consumption of locally produced nutritious foods especially fruits and vegetables. Our recent efforts to stimulate fruit and vegetable productions via tunnel house and drip irrigation technologies funded by the Government of the People's Republic of China, is gradually paying off as we now see a significant increase of locally produced fruits and vegetables being sold in domestic food markets and supermarkets.

We are experiencing increasing rural to urban, and to some extent, international migration. This trend, due to a variety of reasons, including the misconception about the lack of meaningful remunerated employment opportunities and the perceived low status associated with the agriculture sector, compared to other sectors of our economy, continue to impede the full realization of our agricultural development efforts.

To change this mindset, we are working with our partners on some agricultural and fisheries incentives to encourage our young people to stay, and for others, to return to farm their land for income generation purposes and for a fulfilling way of life. We are determined to engage our young, educated and skilled people to pursue agriculture as a viable and respected occupation to increase import substitution and expand our export markets or we will struggle to maintain our food security and nutrition.

Our agriculture is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change such as frequent and extreme rainfall events, longer dry spells and drought events, rising sea levels, extreme winds, and occasional tropical cyclones, and variability will continue to challenge our resolve in elevating the agriculture and fisheries sector as a major driver of our economy. To mitigate these challenges, we are working with our development partners to ensure our agricultural and fisheries resource management practices are in place, and that our climate resilience and risk mitigation efforts are strengthened and enhanced.

Exotic pests and diseases are a real concern for Samoa. The immediate threats of the African Swine Fever and the Guam strain of the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle are examples of incursions that would do irreparable damage to our economy. Therefore, preventing, managing and eliminating these biosecurity threats is vital to maintaining and advance our economic and social wellbeing. And this requires a strong integrated systems approach that is locally led, owned and managed.

Honourable Chairman,

Samoa's inshore and coastal fisheries are important for our food security and nutrition but we have restricted potential for increased production due to the limited areas within the reef and vulnerability to over harvesting due to increasing fishing pressure and uncontrolled fishing practices. We have a responsibility to address IUU fishing, effective management of our fisheries, conservation of our marine ecosystems, and development of our small-scale fisheries within the confines of our meager resources. In this regard, we are partnering with some of our regional and international organizations including FAO, IFAD, World Bank and our other development partners to respond to these challenges.

In closing, I would also like to thank the Director General of FAO, and the Secretariat for all the initiatives and technical assistance provided to Samoa, and other Pacific member states, via the Sub-regional Office for the Pacific. These have contributed positively and will continue to support the achievement of outcomes delivery for the agriculture and fisheries sectors especially in these challenging and trying times due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I wish you all the best and look forward to fruitful deliberations over the next two days.

Thank you and God Bless.

Soifua ma ia manuia!