

KINGDOM OF TONGA Country Statement

Delivered by Honorable Sione Sangster Saulala, Minister of Agriculture and Food, Forests and Fisheries

The Director General of FAO, Dr. da Silva, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

With your kind permission Mr. Chairman,

I am much obliged indeed to give a brief statement on behalf of the Kingdom of Tonga. MALO E LELEI.

First and foremost, I acknowledge the presence of the Almighty God in our midst today and beyond.

I humbly thank FAO for the invitation that enabled me to represent my small country in this important meeting of the "Seventieth Session of the Committee on Commodity Problems".

Mr. Chairman, I have looked around and I'm not surprised to find that I maybe the only one representing the South Pacific. Ironically, it is due high COSTS, remote GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION, ECONOMY OF SCALE, and stiff PROTOCOL and complicated PROCESSES that the smallest of the small ISLANDS and ISLAND GROUPS continue to encounter in commodity problems.

Considering the above-mentioned challenges faced by the islands of the South Pacific, it is a great pleasure that I must acknowledge the continued assistance of FAO in developing of the agriculture and fisheries sector. As a result, the following FAO initiatives and projects proved to enhance Tonga's efforts in minimizing of the problems encountered by the local poor communities:

1. FAO provides timely and appropriate financial and technical assistance in formulating of the National Agriculture Census that is long overdue. Statistics is of utmost importance for policy and technical decision making in agriculture and fisheries. The assistance of FAO in leading the formulation of the Agriculture Census. This exercise will enable us to determine accurate statistics that will allow us to find alternatives to encounter several commodity problems.
2. Disaster Risk Management is an increasing challenge for Tonga's agriculture and fisheries sectors. I must thank the FAO for being there always when there is a cyclone; tsunami or prolonged drought strikes our beloved Kingdom. FAO and the International FOOD SECURITY & LIVELIHOOD CLUSTER continue to assist us in resources assessments, technical assistance provision of essential tools and supplies that enables local communities to get back into normal livelihood hence equipping them to push through during difficult times. I therefore thank FAO for the current TCP project on fisheries assistance targeting the poor and vulnerable fishing communities. It is with this project that the area of Disaster Risk Management is promoted and encouraged nationwide. We are currently experiencing a prolonged drought period for over six months to date. Sir, I may be asking too much from you organization. Nonetheless, that is exactly what a poor and vulnerable country like Tonga is obliged to be doing.
3. BIOSECURITY challenges continue to hinder agriculture and fisheries production, especially in commodity exports. Mr. Chairman, it took us three long days to finally make it here. We had to fulfill several official papers, not mentioning our inabilities to comprehend the complicated processes. Translating to agriculture and fisheries, this signifies the need for

Tonga to explore our agriculture and fisheries PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT capacities. Given the past assistance of FAO in the area of biosecurity, Mr. Chairperson, may I take this valuable opportunity to request FAO's assistance in DEVELOPING TONGA'S PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT CAPACITIES?

4. There is an on-going fisheries project that FAO provides assistance in developing sustainable production of local fisheries for food security purposes. Again, I urge FAO to consider future assistance to economical commodities namely; SEA CUCUMBER, a commodity that gives local a total of 3-5 million annually. This figure maybe low to our wealthy friends here today, however, it accounts for about 50 percent of the total income achievable by the local fisherman. Currently, locals are harvesting a resource-base that is rejuvenated naturally for duration of one month annually. Mr. Chairperson, Tonga needs assistance in FARMING OF SEA CUCUMBER and I beg FAO favorable considerations in this regard.

Mr. Chairperson, our government is doing its utmost best to put together all available human and capita resources to try and improve economy, while ensuring that the environment is harmonized. As such, the PUBLIC-PRIVATE-PARTNERSHIP mechanisms are being encouraged. A testimony to this is the development of Tonga's first NATIONAL AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES SECTOR PLANS. As such, I humbly urge FAO to join us, together with other donor partners in formulating this important plan in which the private sector is instrumental in its formulation.

Mr. Chairman, I humbly thank you for this valuable opportunity in giving the country statement for the Kingdom of Tonga.

MALO 'AUITO