

COUNTRY STATEMENT OF TUVALU
TO THE HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY:
THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIOENERGY.
DELIVERED BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF
TUVALU, THE DIRECTOR OF AGRICULTURE
MR ITAIA LAUSAVEVE.

Mr Chairman, Co-Chairs, The Director General of FAO, Your excellencies Heads of Government, Honorable Ministers, delegates, Ladies and Gentleman;

I am deeply honored to be given this great opportunity to represent the government and people of Tuvalu, as our Prime Minister, The Honourable Apisai Ielemia could not avail his presence to this High Level Conference, as the dates and timing of this conference, coincides with our National Parliament meeting. In this regard, the Honourable Apisai Ielemia would like to convey his sincere apologies for his absence but at the same time, thanking FAO for inviting Tuvalu to participate and share in this conference, where he further extends his best wishes to all excellencies Heads of States, Honorable Ministers and delegates to this high level conference, fruitful dialogue and deliberations, to addressing the ever increasing and pressing needs of our global community on Food Security that we are facing today

Mr Chairman, Tuvalu shares with very great concern, the current global issue of high food prices, food shortages and their associated social problems on humanity that is happening around the world. Tuvalu is not immune to these problems but very vulnerable, given the nature of our atoll small island states that are, low lying islands, limited lands and poor soils, limited diversity of food crops and so on. Our own local food production has been declining as they are no longer competitive to the cheaper food imports that we have become so dependent upon within the last decade. Some of these imported foods particularly rice, flour and sugar have become our new staple foods. Our reliance on such food imports with the high prices that we are beginning to experience in the near future will be a threat to our food security. We are also facing increases in our local fish price that has doubled in the last twelve months because of fuel price increases.

The government is however looking at measures such as reducing its customs duties or import tariffs on such goods but may not be enough as our economy depends on such tariffs for government revenue collections for national development to an extent. Other possible measures would certainly be over our control given that they emanate from powerful producing countries in their dominance on world agricultural food crop production with their trade policies that are not often conducive to many developing countries. We therefore ask these countries work closely with international governing bodies like FAO, IFAD and WFP to seriously work closely and adopt the counter measures or possible solutions that these organizations have put forward to international communities particularly wealthy nations to finance the immediate, medium and long terms needs of our food security and livelihoods.

The government of Tuvalu has begun to look into the feasibilities of bio-energy but on a very little scale at this stage. Land scarcity, land tenure systems and the narrow diversity of potential crops are some major problems. Although there is potential for

such technology on our coconuts that is the dominant food crop species in our country, however, there is concern over its future development and its impact on our food security. Since, for many generations the coconut tree has provided one of our main stable food security source even today in the rural communities as well as a very important feed source for our livestock.

There has been in depth work for nearly ten years on renewable energy, particularly solar energy which the government has been keen to develop this further as an option. However this development would require further technical and financial assistance for our rural communities to fully enjoy its benefits to improve their sustainable livelihoods.

Tuvalu has been one of the countries in the forefront and will continue to do so in such opportunities, in its international plea in international meetings and negotiations for industrial countries to reduce their carbon emissions because of global warming and Climate Change.

The impacts of climate change in our low lying country is already happening and is affecting our traditional agriculture where over 60% of our population in rural communities and outer islands depend for their food security. Each year we lose many coconut trees on our shore lines because of tidal erosion from sea level rise. Our back yard food gardens in low lying grounds are becoming more commonly inundated during particular high tides of the year, so as to our root crops in the interior, as sea level rise during these particular high tides force salt water intrusion into our water lens where these root crops are cultivated. These are some of the more obvious impacts of Climate Change but there are others such as slowly increase in frequency of tropical cyclones, warming seas causing bleaches to coral life that is affecting our marine food security sources. Such events have to be mitigated in one way or another and we in Tuvalu and other global communities sharing these similar problems do not have all answers to solve them.

The Tuvalu government launched quite recently its National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA) because of this Climate Change Phenomena that took several years to complete by major stake holders in the country. The NAPA covers major sectors of development and would try to address food security through activities such as introduction of exotic salt tolerant root crops, other new crops and improving traditional farming systems to increase production.

In a more recent development, Tuvalu is part of a regional initiative between the South West Pacific Region and FAO called the Food Security and Sustainable Livelihoods of the Pacific (FSSLP). This program will try to address the immediate, medium and long term Food security needs of the Pacific populations by increasing food production through provisions of planting materials, inputs to facilitate cultivation, support infrastructure development such as irrigation, development of roads, storage facilities etc, and development of trade related aspects to facilitate countries to be more competitive in regional and international trade.

The Government of Tuvalu appreciates the assistance provided by the FAO, particularly through its Office in the Pacific, and other regional agencies like the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) over the years. Through collaborative

work, Tuvalu and the SPC have developed a Joint Country Strategy based on the NAPA for which the regional agency could direct its assistance, in terms of Climate Change adaptation influencing food security, particularly in the areas of Plant Genetic Resources, Farming Systems appropriate for atoll countries, and the strengthening of the agricultural and agroforestry research and development work.

As has been stated at a number of International forums, Tuvalu and other island countries in the Pacific have not been contributing significantly as other countries in the industrialized world to the causes of Climate Change. We believe therefore that the international community and in particular industrialized countries have a major role and responsibilities in mitigation measures caused by Climate Change and increases in food prices that is threatening our food security and therefore should share in resolving these problems by increasing their financial and technical assistance to the impacted and vulnerable developing countries in their food security programs that they have identified regionally and nationally.

Finally Tuvalu wishes to take this opportunity to acknowledge the presence of the various international development and funding agencies besides FAO as well as the industrialized donating partners and we look forward for their continued participation, cooperation and commitments to the outcomes of this High Level Meeting, for the common good of our humanity in our collective and collaborative efforts, to address our food security from the challenges of Climate Change, High Food Prices and Bioenergy development.

Thank you all.