Government of Tuvalu Statement for the Mid Term Review of the 6th Asian and Pacific Population Conference

26th - 28th November 2018, United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok, Thailand

Mr / Madam Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honored to deliver this statement on behalf of the Government of Tuvalu. Allow me to acknowledge all efforts that have gone into organizing this Mid Term Review of the Sixth APPC Ministerial Declaration, in particular the work of UNESCAP and UNFPA.

Tuvalu is one of the world’s smallest islands. Our nine atoll islands make up 25.6 square kilometers of arable land, scattered over 1.2 million square kilometers of ocean. Our biggest vulnerability is to natural disasters and climate change. In this challenging development context, the Government of Tuvalu recognizes the prominence of the ICPD Programme of Action in establishing important linkages between population and development, and in bringing to the center of development sexual and reproductive health and rights and the empowerment of women. The aspirations of the ICPD, the SAMOA Pathway and the SDGs are woven into the Te Kakeega III, the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016 to 2020. The Government of Tuvalu remains fully committed to the ICPD Programme of Action, and we reaffirm that the Sixth APPC Ministerial Declaration adopted in 2013 is a relevant guiding document, particularly in addressing the unfinished business of the ICPD Programme of Action and in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals.

Since 2013, Tuvalu has made some progress in a number of areas of the Sixth APPC Ministerial Declaration. The Strategic Health Plan (2009 – 2019) prioritize sexual and reproductive health. The Ministry of Health has trained midwives and nurses to provide quality antenatal and postnatal clinics, and conduct early referrals to the Princess Margaret Hospital, the National Referral Hospital. This has contributed to zero preventable maternal deaths since 2013(1). The provision of reproductive health information and services to youth has contributed to a reduction in the adolescent fertility rate from 42 to 28 births per 1,000 women ages 15-19, between 2010 to 2015.

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1 Key Sexual and Reproductive Health Indicators, Pacific Data Table (UNFPA, 2017)
The largest health challenges we grapple with is the rising incidence of Non-Communicable Disease (NCD). While we have progressed with a whole of government approach to addressing NCDs as articulated in the Tuvalu National Strategic Plan for Non Communicable Diseases 2017-2021, continued technical and funding support is needed to upscale our primary health care activities to fully engage communities in primary health care programmes.

In the area of sexual and reproductive health, we are pleased to see a steady decline in adolescent fertility however, we are deeply concerned that universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is yet to be fully realized with 24.2% unmet for modern contraceptives. This could be attributed in part to the recent funding cuts to UNFPA in country programs. In ensuring universal health coverage including for sexual and reproductive services, the Government of Tuvalu needs accelerated and sustainable resources to address the sexual and reproductive health needs of everyone, including young people, women and persons with disabilities, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We would like to ensure full access to sexual and reproductive health services that are respectful and non-judgmental at all times, particularly for women and girls during times of disasters and in humanitarian settings. We reaffirm our commitment in the SAMOA Pathway to protect the human rights of all, particularly the human rights of women and their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. We need continued development assistance to help us fully realize this commitment.

Our biggest vulnerability is to natural disasters and climate change. We are seeing frequent king tides and prolong droughts. In times of natural disaster, ensuring access to essential basic services to affected populations across miles of ocean is a real challenge. We recognize the need to reach all affected people including women and girls, young people and persons with disabilities, and to fully engage civil society organizations, faith based organizations to reach affected populations in far remote islands. We recognize the aspirations of the KAILA Declaration in relation to the important linkages between climate change and reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (RMNCAH), adopted by Pacific Health Ministers including the Honorable Health Minister of Tuvalu, and we reaffirm our commitment to the KAILA Declaration.

On-going support for gender equally has been supported by our Gender policy and programmes under the leadership of the Prime Minister's Office. We recognize that gender based violence is prevalent in the Pacific and in Tuvalu we have seen 37% prevalence of lifetime physical and/or sexual violence against women by an intimate partner. We recognize gender based violence is a human rights violation and requires a multi-sectoral and multidimensional whole of government approach to squarely address gender based violence. We are continuing our efforts to raise greater awareness on
the prevention of gender based violence, in supporting women to make informed decisions about their bodies and empowering young people to make informed life choices. To fully achieve our policy objectives in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, the Government of Tuvalu needs sustainable funding support to implement comprehensive programmes and help us institutionalize gender equality in all our sectors and communities.

Tuvalu developed the National Population Policy in 2011 with priority policy objectives in the areas of health, gender equality, youth empowerment, urbanization, migration and climate change. These areas remain critical development issues for Tuvalu. In 2015, with the support of UNFPA, we analyzed our census data to develop comprehensive monographs on urbanization and migration. We are pleased to report that urbanization and migration are prioritized in the Te Kakeega III, the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-2020. We need to enhance our national institutional capacities to collect, and analyse data to inform our development planning and programme design, to collect baselines and measure our progress with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This support will help us to expand the duration of the National Population Policy, a critical multisectoral instrument that support the Kakeega III.

Recognizing the prominence of the ICPD Programme of Action and its contribution to the SDGs, and the relevance of the Sixth APPC Ministerial Declaration in the unfinished business of the ICPD in Tuvalu, we are committed to stay engaged for the 2019 Commission on Population and Development. Fakafetai lasi. Tuvalu mote Atua. I thank you for your attention.