

**STATEMENT BY**  
**H.E. MINUTE ALAPATI TAUPU**  
**AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND**  
**PLENIPOTENTIARY**  
**EMBASSY OF TUVALU TO THE REPUBLIC**  
**OF CHINA (TAIWAN)**

**at the**  
**MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON**  
**REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION**  
**AND INTEGRATION IN ASIA AND THE**  
**PACIFIC**

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(Please Check Against Deleivery)

Your Excellency, Mr. Chairperson,  
Executive Secretary,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to speak on behalf of the Government and People of Tuvalu on this occasion of the first Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific.

At the outset, let me congratulate your Excellency – Afioga Honourable Faumuina Tiatia Faaolatane Liuga on your being elected as Chairperson of this Ministerial Conference and please rest assured that Tuvalu will give its full support and cooperation in your leadership role in this important Conference. Tuvalu also associates itself with the sentiments you have just indicated in your country statement this morning on LDC's transitional and graduation processes.

It is still relevant at this stage to reflect Tuvalu's current stance/concern on LDC issues as was expressed explicitly by Tuvalu's Deputy Prime Minister – Hon. Vete Sakaio, in his statement at the recent General Debate at the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNGA and I quote his words as follows:

**“Tuvalu graciously appreciates ECOSOC's decision to defer consideration of Tuvalu's graduation from the LDC category as under the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPOA). This said, however, it is the humble submission of Tuvalu that while the thresh-hold criterias of LDC graduation are well-established, including the HDI, GNI Per Capita, and Economic Vulnerability Index, it would be simply irrational and irresponsible if the application of any two of the three criterias was to be the only measure of graduation considerations. Given our extreme vulnerability as a SIDS, Tuvalu believes failure to satisfy EVI carries more weight for us in considering our graduation from the LDC list.”**

**END OF QUOTE**

Honourable Mr. Chairman, the costs and risks associated with graduation for Tuvalu at the moment are likely too great given Tuvalu's unique economic problems and

prevailing uncertainty and instability in world markets and this economic uncertainty is mirrored and possibly exceeded by climatic, environmental and social uncertainties and risks. In summary, should Tuvalu graduate from being an LDC, the economic and social benefits that situation will bring to Tuvalu will simply be nothing. In this regard therefore, we call on UNESCAP's help to pursue appropriate representation of member countries of ESCAP for fairer processes and criteria in the line of LDC graduation considerations.

Tuvalu continues to reaffirm its confidence in the Executive Secretary in her exemplary leadership in managing the affairs of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), and expresses its gratitude to the Executive Secretary for her diligence in arranging this opportunity to discuss integration in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, I am pleased to take this opportunity to thank the Government and People of Thailand for their warm and gracious hospitality in hosting the present Conference.

I would also like to thank the Commission for convening the Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries during the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of ESCAP, the Special Body on Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries during the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of ESCAP, and the Asian and Pacific Regional Implementation Meeting on Rio+20 Outcomes in April. Furthermore, I thank the Secretariat for co-organizing the Pacific regional preparatory meeting for the 2014 Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in July, and recognize with gratitude the continued cooperation between the Secretariat of the Commission and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. These sessions, conferences, and cooperative actions have aided in promoting careful consideration of the opportunities for and challenges to sustainable development in least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS), and will assist in the elaboration of interests and concerns specific to Pacific island developing countries (PIDCs) during deliberation on the post-2015 UN development agenda.

In response to the focus of the present Conference, as well as issues raised in the theme study *Growing Together: Economic Integration for an Inclusive and Sustainable Asia-Pacific Century*, the two background papers prepared for the Conference:

1. "Towards a Broader Integrated Market in Asia and the Pacific" and
2. "Enhancing Regional Cooperation in Connectivity and Finance and in

Addressing Shared Vulnerabilities and Risks in Asia and the Pacific”,

and also the draft “Bangkok Declaration on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific,”

I would like to particularly elaborate on two points:

First, the draft Bangkok Declaration’s statement that “challenges generally associated with least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States [SIDS] reduce the impact of regional cooperation and integration initiatives” (p. 6), and its reminder that these countries require “specific policies on productive capacity-building related to infrastructure development, broadening the economic base, access to finance and providing assistance in overcoming the risks and shocks of entering into a regional trade block” (p. 6) are crucial considerations when contemplating the establishment of regional cooperation for portions of the Pacific sub-region. Consequently, support to LDCs and SIDS to implement infrastructure development, close infrastructure gaps, and enhance diversification is essential before these nations can successfully and sustainably participate in the work of regional integration and is critical to developing the concept of “regionalism with a human face” in which special and differential treatment and economic assistance is provided for poorer economies (*Growing Together*, p. 16).

Second, I would like to discuss the first, second, and fourth pillars highlighted in *Growing Together*, namely, “an integrated market,” “seamless connectivity,” and “addressing shared vulnerabilities and risks,” as well as their convergence with Tuvalu’s current national goals.

The emphasis of the “integrated market” pillar on locating complementarities between and export opportunities among sub-regions in the Asia-Pacific, highlighting the significance of migration flows, and developing possibilities for intraregional tourism signifies a potential solution to Tuvalu’s reiteration of the dangers of unemployment as a widespread problem at the root of numerous economic and social difficulties in the nation. Moreover, Tuvalu’s national initiatives to procure increased employment opportunities for seafarers abroad, identify potential for other overseas jobs, and expand demand for tourism services dovetail with concepts at the core of the “integrated market” pillar and are signs of an inclination on the part of Tuvalu toward greater integration within the Pacific sub-region and the larger Asia-Pacific region. This inclination is also indicated by Tuvalu’s participation in the Pacific Island

Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA), signature of the PICTA Trade in Services Protocol, and participation in negotiations for the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus. Obviously, however, as explicated in the paper "Towards a Broader Integrated Market in Asia and the Pacific," the goal for concepts presented at this Conference entails moving beyond sub-regional integration and toward greater regional cooperation. To the extent that regional integration can support Tuvalu's development and economic objectives as stated above, we can appreciate the importance of this aim, but we must caution, as we have before, that regional economic growth cannot be championed to the exclusion of environmental protection.

With regard to the second pillar, seamless connectivity in the areas of transport and information and communications technology (ICT) is a topic on which the Government and People of Tuvalu have exerted significant consideration and effort. The Government of Tuvalu has emphasized the importance of improving transport, Internet, and mobile connectivity within the nation in the establishment of its recent "New Government Priority Roadmap," and has also developed specific goals regarding exploring the possibilities of enhanced connectivity with other nations within the Pacific sub-region. In this regard, Tuvalu appreciates the specific reference in the draft Bangkok Declaration to improving "the economic feasibility of the provision of regular and predictable inter-island shipping services in the Pacific sub-region" (PP18), as well as references in relevant papers to the substantial distance between Pacific islands and rapidly growing economies in Asia. Both the provision of regular inter-island shipping in the Pacific sub-region and the distance between PIDCs and major Asian economies represent unique challenges encountered by the Pacific sub-region that must be addressed before transport in the Pacific can be considered sustainable, social development and economic growth in the area can be enhanced, and transport connectivity throughout the Asia-Pacific region can be attained.

Moreover, in view of Tuvalu's commitment to increasing Internet connectivity, particularly in schools, as well as mobile connectivity, the suggestion in Conference documents that the development of an Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway has the potential to reduce the cost of ICT connectivity is exceedingly crucial, especially as Conference papers have highlighted that ICT services tend to be most expensive in poorer countries and entail a lower quality of delivery and unequal access. Furthermore, *Growing Together* has cited the benefits of enhanced ICT in promoting productivity and empowering populations, and heavy investment in additional ICT infrastructure has been urged. Consequently, ICT connectivity is an area of

infrastructure development in which, if Tuvalu is supported and funded in its current goals of developing national connectivity, it can subsequently achieve more substantial success when participating in the work of regional connectivity and can improve the economic growth of its own nation to subsequently aid in the formation of an integrated market.

As to the fourth pillar on addressing shared vulnerabilities and risks, I would like to commend the Commission on its specific attention to agricultural research and innovation, food security, disaster risk reduction, conservation of natural resources, and climate change mitigation, all of which are key objectives defined within Tuvalu's national strategy and Roadmap. In particular, the draft Bangkok Declaration's call for regional cooperation in assisting members and associate members negatively influenced by the perils of climate change in building resilience to the impacts of this threat is a laudable example of the positive ends to which regional cooperation can contribute. Indeed, this approach could prove critical to the survival of low-lying Pacific islands, which witness daily the relentless encroachment of the ocean, as well as increasingly severe disasters resulting from climate change, and see development gains frequently undone due to environmental threats.

Currently, the Government of Tuvalu is seeking to establish both a National Council on Climate Change and a Climate Change Survival Fund, as well as to improve coordination concerning climate change and disasters, and Tuvalu aims to enhance access to funding through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Bank. Regional cooperation and integration to assist with these projects, whether through funding or experience sharing, will undoubtedly serve to increase the scope of the projects and their potential for success. Tuvalu believes that ESCAP has a critical role to play in advancing enhanced appreciation of the special vulnerabilities of SIDS and LDCs similar to Tuvalu, particularly concerning the perils of climate change, and the Commission's recommendations regarding regional cooperation and recognition in this area are indicative of the potential contributions ESCAP can make to the Pacific sub-region. In this regard, Tuvalu welcomes the work of ESCAP with respect to its Post-disaster Damage and Loss Assessment (DaLA) methodology. We hope this methodology can be refined to provide rapid assessments that can be integrated into the development of a Pacific climate change loss and damage mechanism. We invite ESCAP to assist regional governments, especially those from least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, to

develop appropriate insurance and compensation arrangements to address the impacts of climate change.

Finally, I express my gratitude to the Commission for its consistent reiteration in documents related to this Conference regarding the goals of low-material and low-carbon paths of consumption and development, as well as the establishment and transfer of material- and carbon-efficient technologies. This emphasis serves as a reassuring sign of the growing consensus on the threat of carbon emissions and climate change to the Asia-Pacific region and the necessity to seriously address this threat and provide increased assistance to Tuvalu and nations with similar geographic and environmental conditions.

I thank you, Chairperson.

