

**MADAME CHAIR OF THE COMMISSION AND EXECUTIVE
SECRETARY OF ESCAP - DR. SHAMSHAD AKHTAR;
YOUR EXCELLENCIES,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES;**

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

It is a great pleasure for me today to deliver the country statement on behalf of the Kingdom of Tonga.

From the outset, I would like to congratulate Dr. Shamshad Akhtar on your appointment as the Executive Secretary of the UNESCAP as well as to acknowledge the work of the former Executive Secretary Ms Noleen Hazer.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We come together again today on our collaborative effort to work towards a better future for ourselves, our children, and the future generations to come. In this context, I fully support the theme topic of the 70th Session of the ESCAP meeting for 2014, namely, “Regional Connectivity for Shared Prosperity” and the promotion of the idea of “Not leaving anyone behind.”

The Kingdom of Tonga, as with many small island development states, faces many development challenges in our effort to achieve inclusive sustainable development

for all. This includes diseconomies of smallness and isolation, which gives rise to other issues such as high cost of transport and service provision. This also makes it a challenge to manage our large ocean area in ensuring inclusive sustainable development.

The challenge of smallness and isolation is aggravated by global economic crises which impact Tonga, for example, by reducing remittances and by increasing the cost of our dependence on imported fuel.

There is also the issue of climate change, which we recognize as our biggest challenge. For our low lying islands, climate change will make it difficult or even impossible to live on these islands in the future.

But as the proposed sustainable development goals and the outcome of the upcoming SIDs in Samoa next month, our own national responsibility and ownership is critical to address these challenges.

In this vein, the Government of Tonga has taken initiatives, together with our development partners, to address the challenges that we face in our effort to achieve inclusive sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen

First and foremost, our own economic growth is critical in our effort to address the challenges that we have. Although growth is still weak, the Government of Tonga is aiming to promote economic growth at more than 2.5% for the fiscal year

2014/15. We are determine to achieve this target through local initiatives and with the assistance of all our development partners including UNESCAP.

To address our diseconomies of scale and isolation, Tonga has no choice but to commit to regional and global partnership to assist us in almost all aspects of development, including our national effort to achieve the Millenium Development Goals. We acknowledge herewith the assistance by UNDP through the Millennium Acceleration Framework (MAF) to help us to make progress in areas of our MDGs where we are lagging behind.

The Climate Investment Fund (CIF) has assisted us through the Climate Sector Resilience Project worth \$20m through the Asian Development Bank, which we are on the verge of commencing the implementation of this project in addressing climate change issues in our country.

We also receive bilateral assistance from the Australian Government through a Regional Pilot Project on Risk Resilience for the Pacific which is implemented through the UNDP Program for a total of A\$16m for this regional project, through mainstreaming of risk resilience into our development systems at all levels.

Tonga was also fortunate to become the first beneficiary of the Regional Pacific Catastrophe Insurance Project funded by the Government of Japan, after our Ha'apai Island group was hit by Tropical Cyclone Ian at the beginning of this year as a result of climate change. Tonga would very much like to see this regional insurance project continuing into the future, as Tonga is more prone than ever to frequent natural disasters than in the past.

We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of various development partners, both bilateral and multilateral including UNESCAP, in assisting us in both the immediate response and the long term reconstruction of our Ha'apai Island group after the devastation caused by Tropical Cyclone Ian.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Government of Tonga is also currently implementing its Tonga Energy Road Map (TERM) as a national priority in an effort to reduce our dependence on fossil fuel. In this front, our development partners have assisted us in the promotion of the use of renewable energy with the establishment of solar farms with assistance from the Governments of New Zealand and Japan, as well as the European Commission. Tonga is also exploring the use of other renewable energy sources. We look forward to work together with our partners in the Asia Pacific region through our membership in UNESCAP to help us to reduce our dependence on fossil fuel.

The establishment of the Cable Project in Tonga with joint assistance from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, is an important milestone for our country and an enabling instrument in promoting connectivity for shared prosperity in our region, as well as addressing our challenge of remoteness and geographical isolation. We are still looking at the opportunity to extend the cable project to our outer islands of Vava'u and Ha'apai to ensure the achievement of accessibility for all in a cost effective manner.

The Tonga Transport Sector Consolidation Project funded by the World Bank and the Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility (PRIF) is also assisting us to address the challenges that we have with transport issues, as well as assistance that we receive

through the regional Pacific Aviation Investment Project to address aviation issues, including working together with the Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO).

Last but not the least, as alluded to earlier by the Lord Prime Minister of Tonga, the issue of Non-communicable Diseases is becoming more prevalent than ever in Tonga, and the Government is giving high priority to address this issue with also assistance from our development partners.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to acknowledge all the assistance by UNESCAP to Tonga in our effort to promote Regional Connectivity for Shared Prosperity.

To conclude, I would like to lend our full support towards ^{The} deliberations towards the Post 2015 Development Agenda and the need to strengthen development cooperation not only at the regional level, but more importantly, at the global level. This is evident in making our voice heard through the SIDs conference to be held in Samoa next month.

With these words, I wish you all a successful meeting today and tomorrow.

I thank you
