



## **94-09-05: Statement of Tuvalu, H.E. Mr. Otinielu Tausi**

ISO: TUV

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AS WRITTEN

ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF TUVALU TO THE FULL  
 SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT 5-13  
 SEPTEMBER 1994 FOR DELIVERY ON MONDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 1994

Thank you Mr Chairman

It is a great honour for my country to be represented at the  
 International Conference on Population and Development. Population  
 issues are a prime concern in our pursuit of sustainable long term  
 development in our country

Mr.Chairman

For my delegation, the enormity of this meeting is a little  
 overwhelming. You will appreciate this when I tell you that there are

more participants in this Conference than live in the whole of Tuvalu.

Mr Chairman

Small states, including those in the Pacific, are often overlooked or marginalised at international fora. This is not the case here and I wish to express my thanks to the ICPD Secretariat and the many donors who have made possible our participation in this very important meeting. Together with our Pacific colleagues, we are already actively involved in the discussions and we look forward to further contributions over the next eight days

As I have already said my Government places the highest priority on population issues. We have many problems in regard to overcrowding and unsustainable population growth. These trends are beginning to impact severely on our environment and our economic development. Consequently we are heartened by the recognition in the Programme of Action that population is a multi-dimensional issue. Population, environmental and development issues are inseparably linked.

This said, I must state that the biggest threat to Tuvalu's population is an environmental one. The islands I come from rise no higher than a few metres above sea-level. We are continually threatened by a seemingly increasing number of natural disasters resulting from global climate change. Our very existence is threatened. We could be the first country to disappear as and when the sea-level rises.

It is in this context that I wish to urge both developed and developing countries alike to modify their unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. These patterns, if allowed to continue, will

inevitably lead to sea level rise and the disappearance of my country. The world community will then be faced with 10,000 environmental refugees.

Mr.Chairman

My Government, in full cooperation with our non-governmental sector, is refining and implementing our population policy. This policy, which will complement our other development and environmental policies, has three main concerns: One - Rural-urban migration and the effect this is having on our traditional lifestyle; Two - Management of land resources in a manner which is consistent with the spatial distribution of our population; and Three - Establishment and implementation of effective information, education and communication programmes on population at both the formal and informal levels

In seeking to grapple with these concerns, the most difficult task facing the Government is how to address the crucial and sensitive issue of land. Against modern practices in relation to modern land usage stand our traditional land tenure systems. The Government hopes that resolution of this issue and adoption of efficient land management practices will go some way to ameliorating our population and environmental concerns.

After our people, land is our most limited and most valuable asset. Its centrality is indicated by the way it permeates every aspect of our lifestyle and culture. We have a symbolic relationship. The land is us and we are the land.

As a precursor to improved land management, we are moving increasingly to decentralize our Government administration. In so doing

we seek to extend the benefits of effective land usage as widely as possible. This, we think, is meaningful and sustainable decentralization. Not only will it more effectively counteract rural-urban drift but also bring the tangible benefits of development to those of our far-flung islands which have previously been neglected.

Mr Chairman

Our total population is less than 10,000 but our land area is a mere 26 square kilometres. We recognize therefore that our population growth rate of 1.7% is unsustainable in the long r m. Our target is to reduce this rate to 1.0% per annum by 2004. We think it is a realistic target

To achieve this we are adopting comprehensive information, education and communication programmes. Our formal curriculum is being revised to educate children about population issues and our informal education system is taking the issues to the outlying islands and villages.

An important part of these programmes is education about family planning techniques and the options available to everyone. We are stressing the need for equal participation in family planning from both husband and wife. Equally important is our insistence that all family planning be voluntary. No coercion will be tolerated

All these issues are already reflected in the Programme of Action. There are, of course, many other important ones and I can say that Tuvalu is committing a significant portion of its limited resources to addressing them as well. However, we like many others, need the help of

the international community. If, therefore, the international community is truly committed to addressing population problems, then it must turn its words, and in particular the Programme of Action, into reality. Mr Chairman

The road ahead is long, and in places it may be tortuous. For tiny countries like Tuvalu, the challenges will be all the more daunting. The reality for Tuvalu, as for all the Pacific Island Countries, is that we are an integral part of the international community. And along with many other countries, we face severe resource limitations. The truth, therefore, is that we cannot achieve our population and development goals alone

The Programme of Action has involved a lot of talking and a lot of nice words. But for it to have any teeth, it must be backed by the financial resources of our development partners

Let me conclude now with my wishes for this Conference.

Firstly, I wish that the Conference recognizes the linkages between population, environment and development issues, as Agenda 21 recognized the linkages between environment and development.

Secondly, I wish that in its discussions the Conference resolves the difficult issues in the Programme of Action through mutual understanding, accommodation and consensus.

Thirdly, I wish that through this Conference the international community commits itself wholeheartedly to the implementation of the Programme of Action.

Finally I wish that we never lose sight of the fact that we represent our people. We have an obligation to represent their interests. As I speak I think of friends and family in my home island. They, and millions like them around the world, will be affected by the decisions we make over the next few days.

With these humble wishes I thank you Mr Chairman.

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