



Pacific Leaders Energy Summit

Statement by Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga 22 March 2013

H.E. Lord Tuvakano, Prime Minister of Tonga,
Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Ambassador Moses,
Delegates,
Development Partners,

I would like to start by commending the Prime Minister and the Tonga Energy Road Map (TERM) Team for their commitment and for so openly sharing their experiences on the road to fully implement the TERM.

For those of you who do not know me, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Christiana Figueres, I am from Costa Rica, a small country on the other side of this beautiful planet, and I am the Executive Secretary of the Climate Change secretariat.

Yesterday, after the different presentations of the TERM team, I briefly touched upon the links between initiatives such as this and the global measures to address climate change, I would now like to expand on this.

The TERM addresses two urgent needs:

1. At the national level, as we heard yesterday, it fosters the needed transition away from fossil fuels and helps to optimize the use of domestic natural and financial resources.
2. At the global level it helps to pave the way for the needed international legally-binding agreement, by providing much-needed examples and success stories of transitioning beyond fossil fuels. An ambitious legally-binding agreement is the only way to guarantee the survival and the future growth of SIDS. Yesterday, we focused on the opportunities of renewable energy and did not refer to the negative impacts of climate change, including coastal erosion, increased magnitude and unpredictability of cyclones and – as a recent study has indicated – the possible yearly bleaching of coral reefs, which would not allow them to recuperate.

The move to renewable energy will help achieve both the above national and international objectives, because it will help to:

1. Stabilize national economies and allow to re-allocate the 15% of GDP that Tonga, 9% that Samoa, 30% that Cook Islands are currently dedicating to importing fossil fuels. Scarce national funds would be better invested in health, education and adaptation, while the international funds for the latter start to flow or are scaled up.
2. It provides the needed examples of successful models and plans that the world urgently needs. What Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Cook Islands and Solomon Islands are planning and implementing in terms of transitioning to renewables for electricity generation is a courageous example of what the rest of the world needs to do.
3. It helps to establish the new development norm: the low carbon economy. While the islands cannot reverse global emission trends, they can send clear signals to the international markets that we are on an irreversible path toward a green economy.

Fortunately we already have other clear signals, at the international, national and private sector levels.

At the international level, the last three intergovernmental climate negotiations held in Cancun, Durban and Doha have been successful inasmuch as they have achieved what they had to achieve to move the climate regime forward; however, this directional move forward continues to be too slow. The most recent conference held in Doha saw the birth of a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol and although it now has fewer participants, it ensures that the robust rules-based system we have in place is preserved for the 2015 universal agreement. I would like here to recognize the role that SIDS have played in achieving the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. Ambassador Moses, leading the SIDS all last year, was a key player that ensured this successful outcome.

At the national level, we also have clear signals. All industrialized countries have made emission reduction pledges, 56 developing countries have identified nationally appropriate mitigation actions, more than 100 countries have renewable energy legislation, over 30 countries have comprehensive climate change legislation, and counting.

The private sector has also provided encouraging signals with US\$1 trillion invested in renewables energy in 2011 and more and more large companies and conglomerates disclosing their emissions and implementing measures to reduce their emissions all along their value chains.

All these signals are indeed positive, but they remain decidedly insufficient in terms of the scale and speed which we need. Further integration of all three levels, international, national and private sector will also help to reach the low carbon economy that we need to ensure the response to climate change. And respond we must. We cannot have a Plan B because we don't have a Planet B.

My job as Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC is to support all of you, and all the other governments of the world to reach an agreement by 2015. One of the ways in which I do this is by constantly challenging all stakeholders to move faster, because it is evident that no one is doing enough. Here at this Pacific Leaders Energy Summit, I would however like to thank you and not to challenge you. I come to the islands to renew my commitment to this cause, and I come to the islands to gather inspiration. The presentations yesterday on the TERM have provided me with at least five inspirations which I would like to share with you before closing my remarks:

1. The first inspiration is the fact that a clear vision is what guides the conception and development of the TERM. In the climate change process, this equates to the shared vision. We have not yet achieved this shared vision; it, in fact, remains one of the greatest challenges.
2. The second inspiration is that we cannot ‘take no for an answer’. We heard yesterday that developing and implementing the TERM has not been exempt of challenges; however, Tonga has not taken no for an answer and has pushed all relevant stakeholders to think out of the box. This is the determination we need to have at the international level: we simply cannot afford NOT to address climate change.
3. The third inspiration I take with me is the sense of urgency that has allowed the TERM to get started and has allowed us to be here to witness its successes and challenges. I would like to particularly recall what we heard yesterday of the need for speed that the Tongan leadership was able to inspire development partners with and which reduced initial time estimates. This is the sense of urgency we need to inject into the international negotiations. We must realize that we are running out of time.
4. The fourth inspiration is the benefit of collaboration. The participation of all sectors of the Tonga government in the TERM and the collaborative work of development partners are a testament of the need for a collaborative approach to solving problems. In the climate change negotiations this collaboration spirit is very needed. We will only solve the challenge if we solve it together.
5. Lastly, the fifth inspiration I take with me from this leaders summit is the need for political will. We heard that nothing would have happened on the TERM were it not for unequivocal political will. On this, I take comfort in knowing that the leaders and delegates of the small island States will continue to bring their unwavering political will to the climate change negotiations.

Because I know that you realize that in our efforts to address climate change, impossible is not a fact, it is an attitude.

Thank you.

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