



**Statement of Mr. Paula Pouvalu Ma'u
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Head of Delegation for the Kingdom of Tonga
At the Sixth Session of the Global Environment Facility Assembly**

Vietnam, Wednesday, 27th June 2018

Mr. President,

Allow me to congratulate you on assuming the role of President of the six session of this august body and let me assure you of my delegation's full support. We align our statement with those delivered by the Pacific Group.

Mr. President,

This year's session and the launching of the GEF 7 replenishment is timely in light of the persistent and continuing effects and impacts of pollution that detrimentally affects the health and wellbeing of our people and our planet. The interconnected nature of our planet and its various ecosystems, particularly that of the ocean, recognizes the necessity of global, regional and national actions to combat the scourge of pollution.

Last year, the Pacific Leaders meeting agreed on the 'Blue Pacific' identity as the core driver of collective action for advancing regional cooperation for sustainable development. The Blue Pacific as a new narrative calls for inspired leadership and a long-term foreign policy commitment to act as one "Blue Continent". The new GEF-7 program aligns closely with the Blue Pacific identity and through joint efforts, we look forward to leveraging investments that are inclusive of the GEF-7 funds towards the sustainable management of ocean resources in the Pacific.

Marine plastics and micro-plastics are polluting our lands and oceans. We are the oceans and by protecting the oceans, we protect ourselves. Our people consume up to 10 times more fish than the global average and our research have shown that 97 percent of fish species in the study samples have micro-plastic ingested. Plastics is now on the menu in our homes and we must act now to address this properly.

Mr. President,

The Kingdom of Tonga, as a small island developing State, is greatly dependent on a healthy natural environment, particularly that of the ocean. Our traditional methods, and subsistent way, of living in the past, fostered practices which were environment friendly through the use of natural and biodegradable resources. The woven basket from coconut fronds is a simply better than the plastic bag both as its both a biodegradable and is an environmentally-friendly alternative to the same. However, the ever-increasing pace of economic and technological advancements has accelerated Tonga's transition and dependency on imported goods bringing about growing volumes of solid, hazardous, and chemical wastes to a country with a limited capacity to manage such wastes.

Additionally, the transboundary movement of wastes and impacts of pollution, makes country, like many small island developing States, in an exponentially more vulnerable situation given the detrimental effects of pollution, and which most often than not, originates from and is caused by others.

Over the years, Tonga has continued to suffer from marine pollution brought about by ocean currents, which include marine debris such as plastics, processed timber, paper and abandoned, discarded and lost fishing gear, amongst others. The economic, social, and environmental impacts of marine pollution includes contamination of the food supply consumed by local communities, a financial burden of cleaning up and disposing of the waste, damage to infrastructure, and poses risks to safety of navigation at sea.

Mr. President,

Tonga recognizes the importance of existing national, regional, and international laws, commitments, and frameworks to beat pollution, whether it be ocean, air, or land-related. The combination of approaches forms a strong interwoven mat, which together combined efficiently and effectively, strengthens and enhances efforts to beat pollution at all levels. In so saying, Tonga recognizes the various existing frameworks, particularly the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the SAMOA Pathway, that incorporates approaches to address the challenge of pollution at the international level, and contributes to the sustainable development of Tonga. In addition, Tonga would also like to highlight the "Call for Action" outcome document, adopted at the United Nations Ocean Conference last year, which identified relevant actions to address marine pollution, and at the regional level, the Clean Pacific Strategy 2025 which sets out a long-term strategy for integrated sustainable waste management and pollution prevention and control in the Pacific islands region until 2025.

Mr. President,

Technological and economic advancements have seen man's reach into various parts of the planet which hitherto was untouched. Scientific findings have identified new types of pollution, some which have not been appropriately addressed under existing frameworks. In so saying, the Kingdom of Tonga wishes to highlight current developments under international law which aims

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to address these, in particular the development of an internationally legally binding instrument to address the conservation and sustainable use of the biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, and the ongoing work of the International Seabed Authority to develop exploitation regulations to set out requisite actions, address the plumes resulting from seabed mining and the appropriate actions necessary to address these forms of pollution. The Kingdom of Tonga is actively engaging in both these processes.

Mr. President,

At the national level, with the assistance of partners, and other various stakeholders, has seen the proper management of waste, the passing of a litter control regulation, and the development of legal frameworks and plans to beat pollution.

However, challenges remain as a result of Tonga's limited resources and capacity constraints. These include, the infrastructure to ensure circular and responsible production and supply chains, the capacity to enforce existing frameworks, the science to better understand the various impacts of different forms of pollution in Tonga's environment, and the finance to implement existing obligations to address the scourge of pollution.

The Kingdom of Tonga emphasizes the importance of genuine and durable partnerships, finance, and capacity-building to continue to assist our efforts to address this scourge. It is only with such assistance will Tonga be able to enhance existing actions to beat pollution for a pollution-free Tonga, and thereby contributing towards a pollution-free planet.

Mr. President,

To conclude, the Kingdom of Tonga recognizes that in order to beat pollution, we need to develop robust and synergistic frameworks that enhance existing efforts and identifies the necessary actions to address pollution. The Kingdom of Tonga looks forward to the Assembly considering the various resolutions and decisions, which offer a myriad of approaches to addressing pollution.

I thank you Mr. President.