



VANUATU- COUNTRY STATEMENT

77TH UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FRIDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER 2022

Mr. President

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Mr. President,

It is my great honor and privilege to speak for the first time as the President of the Republic of Vanuatu in this important body, the United Nations General Assembly.

Let me start by congratulating His Excellency Csaba Korosi on assuming the Presidency of the 77th Session of the General Assembly. I assure you that during your tenure, my delegation will work closely with you to implement the agendas you set out in this session.

Mr. President, your vision for the United Nations 77th General Assembly is fitting to address the myriad of global challenges that confront us today.

I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to His Excellency Abdulla Shahid for his Steller leadership as the President of Hope of the 76th session, during an unprecedented and tumultuous year. Your inspiring work for humanity has left a strong impression here at the United Nations and around the world.

Mr. President,

Today the world is facing a profusion of mounting challenges, many of which are inextricably linked. We are slowly recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic but recovery is becoming ever more difficult with rising debt levels and the looming inflation caused by supply chain disruptions and rise of prices of fuel and food resulting from the Russia -Ukraine crisis. These challenges pose a major risk of global recession and add to the rising humanitarian crisis that we are already faced with. As we gather here, more families around the world are finding it extremely harder to put food on the table, pay their rent and bills and to meet other basic necessities. This hardship can be avoided by deploying smarter diplomacy and appropriate macroeconomic policies.

These challenges are further compounded by an existential climate crises that is already devastating our economies and our ecosystems. Over the past years, we have witnessed record heat, wildfires, severe hurricanes, coral bleaching, rising sea levels, prolonged droughts and record flooding's. The global challenges that we are facing impacts the poor and the vulnerable the hardest. Without adequate basic social safety nets, and fundamental human rights protections, their future is uncertain.

Mr. President,

Every day we are experiencing the debilitating consequences of the climate crisis, and the world is now demanding more ambitious action on climate at every level.

This emergency of our own making is now affecting all people, those from the poorest to richest nations. No one is immune to the extreme weather events now ravaging our islands, cities, and states— no one can escape the rising tides. Our youth are terrified of the future world we are

handing to them through expanding fossil fuel dependency, compromising intergenerational trust and equity.

Mr. President,

Fundamental human rights are being violated, as we begin measuring climate change not in degrees of Celsius or tons of carbon, but in human lives. The time is up - Action is required now.

And that is why the nations of the Blue Pacific Continent are leading a global initiative to bring climate change to the International Court of Justice, the only principal UN organ that has not yet been given an opportunity to weigh in on the climate crisis. We believe that taking climate change to the ICJ is a global public good and will further support the progressive development of international law.

In this very Hall, working in solidarity with UN member states, we will ask the ICJ for an Advisory Opinion on existing obligations, under international law, to protect the rights of present and future generations against the adverse impacts of climate change.

We believe that legal clarity from the World's Highest Court will help to spur even greater climate action and strengthen the Paris Agreement. We believe in the norms and rule of international law. And we firmly believe that our existing international laws and conventions already contain critical protections for human rights, and for the environment.

Taking climate change to the ICJ via the General Assembly, is not a silver bullet for increasing climate action, but only one tool to get us closer to the end goal of a safe planet for humanity. The Leaders of the Pacific Islands continue to demonstrate higher levels of climate ambition and collective action.

That is why beyond the ICJ, we are supporting several other tools to battle the existential threat of climate change.

We call on all States to join the group of nations proposing to include the crime of Ecocide in the Rome Statutes. Acting with knowledge of severe and widespread or long-term damage to the

environment can no longer be tolerated by the future of tomorrow. We are guardians of that future.

I acknowledge, congratulate and commend the work of the Commission of Small Island States (COSIS), led by Antigua & Barbuda, Tuvalu and Palau to bring the issue of climate change as it relates to the Law of the Sea to the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea.

We call for the development of a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to phase down coal, oil and gas production in line with 1.5°C, and enable a global just transition for every worker, community and nation with fossil fuel dependence.

It is critical that states must revise and enhance their Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement, as Vanuatu has completed last month as we agreed in the Glasgow Pact at COP26.

As you see, we are leaving no stone unturned as we seek solutions to this climate crisis, and I particularly call on all member states to support Vanuatu and our global Coalition as we bring an ICJ climate change Resolution before the General Assembly this session.

Mr. President,

The nuclear risk still remains and presents an existential threat for human species and all forms of life that inhabits the earth. The nuclear risk is becoming even greater given the Ukraine-Russian war and the intense geopolitical tensions rapidly evolving before us. The lack of consensus on the recent Non-Proliferation Treaty Review (NPT) makes it difficult to achieve nuclear disarmament. This division reveals that the NPT as a central pillar of international rules-based order is not seen as a priority by few nuclear powers. This is a major cause of concern for our planet.

Mr. President,

Just like most countries in the world, my country Vanuatu was affected by COVID-19. Our economy is heavily dependent on tourism and this was halted when the borders were closed. Our economic activity significantly declined and households' livelihoods were severely affected.

We have been fortunate that the labour mobility programs enjoyed with Australia and New Zealand has allowed Vanuatu to export these services enabling remittance flows that has helped households' income and boosted our economy. Furthermore, since most of the population resides in the rural areas, the subsistence economy has been able to sustain the livelihoods of the population.

To avert economic decline and social hardships, the government responded by implementing stimulus packages that target household incomes and provided finance to the business sector to keep their businesses afloat. The Government has been able to do this because of accumulation in budget surpluses over the years.

The Government launched a nation-wide COVID-19 vaccine program allowing distributions of essential supplies before COVID-19 reached Vanuatu and as result only few deaths were experienced. As soon as the vaccines rates reached 70% of the total population, the borders were reopened. On this note, and on behalf of the Government and peoples of Vanuatu I would like to convey my gratitude to all our bilateral and multilateral partners that assisted Vanuatu during this difficult time.

The COVID-19 taught us few lessons, one of which is the need to ensure that digital inclusion is prioritized in all our countries. As soon as our schools were closed in Vanuatu, it was difficult for many students to have online classes due to lack of connectivity. I am sure that this is not only a phenomenon experienced in Vanuatu but in other developing countries as well. This is why I believe digitalization requires a concerted global response and action. Without it, the many goals spelled out in the 2030 Agenda may not be realized.

Vanuatu is gradually recovering from COVID-19 and Tropical Cyclone Harold. The borders are open and tourism is starting to bounce back. As it stands, we are poised for an economic growth of 3% in 2022. This recovery, however, is undermined by the inflationary pressures posed by rising prices of fuel and food. This recovery is also threatened by climate change and severe weather patterns as Vanuatu is about to enter into the cyclone season. For Vanuatu, category 5 cyclones are becoming a new normal.

Mr. President,

Vanuatu's fragile economic recovery is a story not only unique to Vanuatu but one that is familiar to most small island developing states (SIDS) and other developing countries. Our economic recovery would require not only the domestic policies that will spur growth and build resilience but which would also require complementary international support measures. One way to do this, is to ensure that SIDS can have access to concessional financing.

As we all know, the current international financial architecture and the criterion deployed to provide finance to the most vulnerable countries, is outdated. The focus solely on GDP measure and not on vulnerability measures is inconsistent with the current economic realities the SIDS are facing.

I am delighted to see that the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) are working with other United Nations members states to craft a Multi-Dimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) with a view to access concessional financing. I join other Leaders in calling on all UN members and in particular the development partners to support this important initiative.

Mr. President

Our large blue ocean space has and will continue to present more complex issues that will affect the way we manage our people's livelihoods. The 2050 Strategy of the Blue Pacific Continent sets out our region's long-term vision and aspirations - our North star and guide to sustaining a healthy, wealthy and prosperous future for our generations to come.

At this juncture one issue that remains gratuitously complex since the birth of our independence is the unjustified and continuous colonial claim over our traditional sovereign waters.

The rights of the indigenous people and their entire territorial waters within our region must be regained and installed in order to enable a sovereign state to shoulder and manage the ever-rising complexity for which the blue ocean space brings forth. In this context the major security and political issue for my country remains the illegal claim of the Matthew and Hunter islands.

Mr. President,

With human rights principles being so well imbedded in the UN Charter and despite countless pleas here in in this august body, human rights violations continue globally, across sovereign and disputed spaces. Here in and across the wider Blue Pacific is no different. Drawing inspiration from the Secretary General's opening statement on Tuesday global report cards will continue to remind our community that more remains to be done.

Mr. President,

In closing, worsened by the deterioration in law and order in many areas around the globe, the challenges before us are a somber reminder that we are still falling short from achieving the ideals envisioned by the UN Charter. The United Nations as the heartbeat of multilateralism and global cooperation remains well placed to address these challenges. I know it can be done but only if we trust each other and work together for the betterment of our common humanity. Our children are watching, their future is in our hands. The time to Act and Lead is now.

I thank you.