

SAMOA



STATEMENT BY

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC, AND THE GLOBAL
ENVIRONMENT**

**Climate Change and Vulnerable Societies:
A Post-Bali Overview**

FEBRUARY 27, 2008

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Mr. Chairman,
Members of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment,
Dear Colleagues and friends.

This is a momentous occasion in the relationship between the United States and Pacific island nations. Today's hearing underpins a new sense of urgency in a partnership we are trying to breathe new life into, to make it meaningful and real. I am particularly conscious that this debating chamber is scared grounds that must be treaded with the greatest of respect. I thank you Chairman therefore for giving Samoa special leave to be part of this process so that its voice can be heard, not alone in isolation, but in unison and in harmony with those of its other fellow Pacific neighbors.

Mr. Chairman,

Today, we have started a conversation. I hope this is the beginning of frequent engagements between your government and ours.

As part of the conversation, my four colleagues before me have spoken eloquently on the special challenges that confront our islands. We are ecologically fragile and vulnerable, and our small size, limited resources, geographic dispersion and isolation from markets, place us at a disadvantage. Moreover, our islands are most affected by the impact of climate change, yet contributed the least to what is happening and are often least able to respond and adapt.

The causes of climate change and those responsible for it, the threats it poses and the solutions to mitigate and adapt against its negative impacts are all well documented, validated by real life experiences and science, and now a matter of public record for open scrutiny.

I will therefore not belabor the same points advocated by my colleagues. Honorable Committee members understand well the issues raised and how they impact on the economic, political and social life of the United States. To add value to our conversation, I will focus instead on one critical missing building block of the Bali Roadmap, which once in place, could well result in other pieces of the jigsaw puzzle falling in place.

Mr. Chairman,

Under the Bali Plan of Action, the agreed building blocks which will be the basis of the negotiations in the next several months are *(i) adaptation, (ii) mitigation, (iii) technology and (iv) finance*.

The fifth and missing ingredient of this roadmap, Samoa believes, is a strong United States Government leadership role in the climate change agenda.

Mr. Chairman,

In Bali, the world leaders spoke with unanimity and one voice. Their message was simple, yet forceful. Climate change is real, irreversible and is already happening. Its impact threatens the survival of small island developing states and other vulnerable groups. It is the single most urgent challenge confronting mankind, and one that demands an immediate, concerted and decisive global response to address it successfully.

For Samoa, the historic achievements of the Bali Conference, included

- the unanimous approval of the Bali Action Plan,
- the operationalization of the Adaptation Fund, and
- Australia's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

These are important milestones in their own rights. Singularly and collectively, they demonstrated in a powerful way that "where there is a political will and government leadership, there definitely is a way"

Why political will?

I say political will because the Bali Road Map and the Adaptation Fund both involved intense, last-minute dramatic and long-drawn out negotiations. The fact that they were adopted by consensus despite the competing viewpoints and sometimes intractable positions of the different stakeholders speaks volume of the noble intentions and desire of the UN membership to agree and reach workable accommodations.

But what has political will got to do with Australia ratifying the Kyoto Protocol? one may ask

Some may beg to differ. For me, the fact that the first foreign policy act of the Government of Kevin Rudd was to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, with or against the weight of available scientific evidence and advice, can only mean one thing. The decision to join the Kyoto Protocol represents a bold type of leadership with a deep sense of responsibility to tackle climate change.

Mr. Chairman,

While the near-universality of the membership of the Kyoto Protocol is to be commended, that alone will not guarantee that climate change can be tackled successfully.

Why?

Because climate change requires a global solution, one with the United States of America taking its rightful place as an integral and leading player in the process. The truth is simple. As long as the United States remains sidelined in the post-Kyoto negotiations that will commence in earnest soon, irrespective of its valid and legitimate reasons, it will not be in position of leadership,

commensurate with its world stature, to shape and influence the final outcome and be part of the solution and not the problem.

Mr Chairman,

Perception is a powerful determinant in any relationship. Founded or unfounded, it can ruin hard-earned gains of trust between, and amongst friends.

The Pacific island nations, in varying degrees, feel that the United States, once their closest ally and protector during their journey of statehood, is gradually losing interest in some of the critical issues and challenges that really matter. Climate change is one candidate that continues to test the resilience of this relationship and at times a source of simmering frustration and uncertainty.

Paradoxically, the Pacific countries with their inherent vulnerabilities and resource constraints, have continued to shoulder faithfully and graciously their allocated share of the load in the global fight against terrorism, and other challenges the United States is leading. This is in spite of the perception by island nations that the sequencing of their priority needs includes development, climate change, human rights and security in that order.

Mr. Chairman,

It is Samoa's view that the United States should take the clear lead in the interconnected and mutually reinforcing areas just listed, but not in a selected few. We continue to maintain that climate change, like other global challenges, crosses borders uninvited with no respect for national sovereignty. It does not discriminate countries between rich or poor, large or small, and whether resilient or vulnerable to its impacts. Its dire consequences are real and everywhere for all to see, including those who would prefer to remain unconvinced. Climate change cannot be wished away, and even those countries which have been in self denial to date, must accept that global warming is unequivocally the result of human activities.

Climate change is a societal problem requiring a decisive response from the world community. It is a global challenge that should unite us, the United States and the Pacific islands together, not divide us.

Mr. Chairman,

Why a global solution?

The answer is obvious. No country can deal with the problem alone. Interdependence is the norm and none is immune from the reaches of global problems challenging our existence. We must work cooperatively in a partnership of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capability, if we are to succeed. We need everyone's input, developed and developing countries alike

for as history has shown, no one country, however powerful and willing can remain aloof forever and be able to solve all these problems on its own.

Underscoring this is the important role of nations in key positions of leadership to the achievement of our collective objectives whether they be in peacekeeping, the environment, poverty alleviation, the fight against terrorism and many other challenges that threaten our world.

Mr. Chairman,

In the same spirit, Samoa hopes that through this hearing, the United States Government will find it in its heart of hearts to lead the charge to implement solutions against climate change. But such a role could prove limited and ineffective if performed outside existing United Nations climate change frameworks. Hence a greatly enhanced and effective role for the United States would be as a party to the Kyoto Protocol.

As present custodians of the world's environment, we owe it to our children and future generations to do what needs to be done quickly, and decisively, before we run out of time. It is therefore imperative to complete a post-2012 Climate Change agreement that is effective, binding, capable of swift implementation and universally owned and respected by the 192 UN member states.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me make a confession before concluding. You see, under any other setting, I probably would have been overly diplomatic and less bold in my plea for the United States to be a party to the Kyoto Protocol and to lead the charge against climate change. But as I said earlier, we have begun a conversation amongst friends which I hope will not be the last. The challenge is to sustain the momentum generated by today's hearing so that years from now, something positive would have come out of it. "*A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step*". Let this hearing be the first but critical step in our journey from here onwards to Copenhagen next year so that we will have in a place a climate regime that guarantees that everyone, every country, every region and every civilization is a winner.

Finally Mr. Chairman,

Let me state the obvious.

You and I are blood brothers, from the same land sharing the same dreams, aspirations and the same inheritance. The United States and the Independent State of Samoa are neighbors. We fight the same wars, share the same ocean, face the same problems and confront the same challenges. Your problems are my problems and my challenges are your challenges.

Samoa looks towards the United States for strong and decisive leadership in the fight against climate change, the Pacific island nations also, ably represented here today, do likewise. Please do not let us down.

I thank you graciously Mr. Chairman and your Committee for giving Samoa a hearing.

Soifua.