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Statement by H.E. Mr. Aliioaiga Feturi Elisaia
Permanent Representative of Samoa to the United Nations
on SIDS Day of CSD -18

10 May 2010

Mr. Chairman,

The vulnerabilities of Small Island developing states, the resulting problems they impose and the accompanying challenges and opportunities they bring forth had been well documented and researched, internationally acknowledged and a matter of United Nations agreed record.

I need not therefore belabor the same point.

Samoa's brief intervention will more usefully focus therefore on one unique feature of the Pacific islands, while often lamented at different foras as a major inhibiting factor to the full realization of the islands' economic potentials, had not, unfortunately, been comprehensively discussed with tangible solutions offered.

Mr. Chairman,

I am referring to the isolation and remoteness of the Pacific SIDS from the rest of the world which remains a major impediment to the growth of Pacific economies. The latest World Economic Report noted that the Pacific SIDS are twice as isolated as their Caribbean counterparts. This is the cold reality. Put simply, our remoteness impacts negatively on every economic activity in the islands making them twice as expensive if not more than other SIDS.

Solutions to overcome this impediment had been suggested and discussed in the past, but these had been approached in an ad-hoc and piece-meal fashion at best. What is required is the willingness by the development community to explore the viability of an integrated whole-of-Pacific-SIDS-approach given that all share this distinctive feature of remoteness.

A word of caution though. Isolation of Pacific SIDS should not be considered simply as a geographical feature that cannot be changed. That is giving up even before trying. The priority focus should be to substantially reduce this isolation in order to enhance the resilience of the region and its people to face up to the many challenges they face individually and collectively.

Mr. Chairman,

In the Pacific region the following are a given.

- Maritime and aviation infrastructure directly underpins the major development sectors in our region e.g. tourism, fisheries, agriculture etc. Pacific SIDS therefore need innovative support to strengthen this infrastructure.
- The digital divide is getting bigger, not lessening. The high start-up costs of accessing and connecting to the ICT can be prohibitive. This again forces the Pacific SIDS be at the end of the queue to benefit from this technology thus exacerbating further their sense of isolation from the rest of the world. This effectively robs them of the opportunity to derive any substantive benefits from ICT. Yet there is great opportunity in reducing the region's isolation by investing in the efficient connectivity of Pacific SIDS with the rest of the world. We need to unlock the development potential that can be realized through connectivity so that we can have ready and affordable access to quality education, markets, health care, advisory services to name a few.

Mr. Chairman,

The plea to the partners and supporters of the Pacific SIDS.

Our region's needs are common knowledge and require no second-guessing.

Help us reduce our isolation. By doing so, the other related challenges will, in time, be addressed and their relative severity pale in comparison.

Don't wait until our islands are in a state of crisis before injecting rescue packages. These are expensive, re-active and non-sustainable. Help us now to help ourselves by supporting some key infrastructural development in sectors that will strengthen our resilience and ability to fend for ourselves and overcome some of the inherent challenges which are solvable.

Thank you.