

SAMOA



STATEMENT BY

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**AT THE HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING OF THE SIXTY-FIFTH SESSION OF
THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

AS A CONTRIBUTION

TO THE

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF BIODIVERSITY

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Co-Chairs,

As with other Pacific Island countries, biodiversity is vitally important to Samoa. In the Pacific we are celebrating the international Year of Biodiversity under the theme "*Value Island Biodiversity – It's Our Life*".

Our coral reefs, forests, plants and animals are integral to our island way of life and are obviously critical to the livelihood of our community and future generations. We therefore note with great concern that global targets to reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss are not being achieved. That the world is also in the middle of a global extinction crisis is cause for future alarm.

Co-Chairs,

In the Pacific region our biodiversity is of global significance, but is highly at risk. Extinction rates in the region, especially for bird species, are among the highest in the world. There are many reasons why the Pacific has so many threatened species, including the vulnerability of small, isolated islands, to impacts such as invasive species, loss of habitat and excessive resource exploitation. Because small islands are particularly vulnerable to species loss and extinctions, we must develop creative solutions through innovative programs and through stronger partnerships.

Our region has called for programs that promote and support local and national ownership of sustainable development and conservation initiatives, and programs that apply the best modern and traditional science to address these alarming trends. The programmes must necessarily take into account the unique system of land ownership in the Pacific, which emphasise the customary ownership of land and marine resources.

At the regional level SPREP – the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme - hosted in Samoa, is spearheading efforts to protect biodiversity throughout the region. The SPREP supported programmes address priority environmental issues through the application of high quality management programmes.

In Samoa we are taking active steps to address the loss of biodiversity. In particular we are moving to control invasive pests, through programmes to eradicate rats and invasive bird species on a number of our islands. We have also launched an initiative to plant one million trees to better protect our water catchment areas and to protect habitat for our native species. Samoa is also at the forefront in promoting organic farming in the Pacific.

Co-Chairs,

The Pacific theme for the international Year of Biodiversity – (to) "*Value Island Biodiversity – It's Our Life*" is particularly relevant to marine and coastal areas. The Pacific Ocean covers 35% of the Earth's Surface. The Ocean is our lifeblood with the majority of Pacific communities living close to the sea. Coastal marine resources have always played a crucial role in the lives of the people for food and economic development.

The Pacific Ocean is home to many large marine animals. Over half of the world's known species of cetaceans and six of the seven known marine turtle species occur in the Pacific, including important populations of green, hawksbill and loggerhead turtles. These marine animals are flagship species for Pacific marine ecosystems and often feature prominently in promotional material for Pacific tourism.

Subsistence hunting of turtles and other marine animals as well as the traditional harvesting of fish species may have been sustainable in the past. However the combination of increasing human populations and the introduction of technology such as outboard motors and gill nets has severely impacted several species, resulting in fragmentation of populations and even local extinctions.

Co-Chairs,

Climate Change presents a major threat to the biodiversity in the Pacific region. For example, coral reefs are very susceptible to temperature increases, and the warming has resulted in significant coral deaths around the region.

The low lying atolls and islands of the Pacific face severe and immediate threats. Climate change is not just an environmental issue – it is also an issue with immense social, economic and moral dimensions.

The protection of biodiversity can play a major role in adapting to climate change. Coastal mangroves vegetation are an important biodiversity resource; these also provide very effective coastal protection as we saw first hand in the tragic Tsunami that struck parts of Samoa in September last year. An investment in biodiversity is therefore an investment in climate change adaptation.

The economic case for biodiversity needs to be better made. Pacific countries need to make the economic case of the importance of biodiversity for protecting fundamental requirements for life, such as the provision of clean water, the protection of fisheries, as well as the protection of basic attractions and assets for the tourism sector.

Distinguished delegates, the world is being called upon to work together to help reduce the rate of biodiversity loss. In the Pacific, governments and peoples of our region are committed to conserving our biodiversity and look forward to the support of development partners and the international community with our efforts.

The International Year of Biodiversity provides our region with an opportunity to highlight and promote the value of protecting biodiversity in the Pacific. The bottom line is life and survival of our communities and future generations.

Thank you