



**Intervention of the Honourable Minister of Education, Sports and Culture, Afioga Loau Solamalealo Keneti Sio, of the Independent State of Samoa to the General Policy Debate – 40<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference of UNESCO, Paris, France  
16<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

President of the 40<sup>th</sup> General Conference  
Director General of UNESCO  
Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring to you all warm greetings from the heart of the Pacific, SAMOA.  
Talofa lava, malo le soifua.

Allow me to begin by sincerely thanking UNESCO for its continuing support to my country and my region, the Pacific. UNESCO's mission is crucial and Samoa is committed to play our role in UNESCO to achieve agreed objectives for Samoa, for the Pacific region, and the world.

It gives me great pleasure to share some of our work with you. We are in the final stage of our short-term national plan, namely, the Strategy for the Development of Samoa, for "Accelerating Sustainable Development and Broadening Opportunities for All". Our long-term Strategy, Samoa 2040, is a vision to capture growth in ICTs, tourism, labour mobility, agriculture, human capital, resiliency development and safety and security for our island nation.

Like other Pacific island economies, Samoa faces constraints imposed by a small domestic market, remoteness from international markets, high transportation costs, weak physical infrastructure and business climate. The economy is also highly exposed to external global conditions, and adverse weather, natural disasters, and crop disease – factors that are beyond its control. The intent of the Samoa 2040 is to provide the platform to trigger transformational change and position Samoa on a higher growth path with the long term goal to ensure the needs of present and future generations are met and that no one is left behind.

I wish to inform this august house that Samoa has chosen to pursue sport as a key enabler for sustainable development in our national strategies. As the host of the Pacific Games 2019, we planned it to support:

- Young sporting talents
- Cultural identities
- Health, education, gender, persons with disabilities, tourism and trade, and
- International and regional partnerships.

Sport in the Pacific brings a whole new dimension to regional cooperation for the development of Pacific Island Countries and an opportunity to explore new partnership models that engage

government via a multi-sectoral approach across sport, health, education, gender, disability, foreign affairs, tourism, trade and economics.

In collaboration with our other partners, UN Environment and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), we delivered the first green Pacific Games. We went 'plastic-free', got all visitors to be part of our "2 million trees" campaign, and met environmental guidelines in liquid and solid waste management.

The Pacific Games 2019 was a collective win for the Pacific. For Samoa's case, it was the first time to gain 3rd place with 119 medals (38 gold, 42 silver and 45 bronze). This is a clear indication of the efforts at country level to boost engagement of our young generations in various sport arenas. We have also strengthened our efforts to promote sports not only through curriculum development, extra-curricular activities but also at the village and community level.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all our Pacific sisters and brothers who participated in the Pacific Games in Samoa. The success of the games is attributed to your excellent sportsmanship, commitment, passion and display of amazing talents. The Solomon Islands has committed to host the next Pacific Games in the same manner.

Excellencies, we benefit from UNESCO being resident in Samoa. Our partnership has enabled disability inclusion, and technical and ministerial roundtables to address difficult issues of doping, malpractices and corruption in sport sector, and sporting standards in relation to the Agenda 2030.

In addition to developing platforms for sports, we need to pay more attention to the importance of investing in our youth, natural and social sciences, and culture as well. UNESCO can provide the conduit through which many of these challenges and gaps can be addressed.

Samoa recognizes the importance of effective investment in human capital. Human resource is one of the few valuable assets Samoa possesses. By investing in their skills, health, and knowledge, they can become productive and contribute effectively to raising the growth trajectory. There is overwhelming evidence across countries that shows strong correlation between investment in human capital and improved economic growth and development in general. There is also a real risk if investment in this area is neglected. For Samoa, fighting non communicable diseases (NCDs) will become a huge burden to the government if nothing is done to reverse the current trend immediately. Investing in human capital and education is therefore critical for the achievement of Samoa's long term development outcomes. This is clearly acknowledged in our national Strategy for the Development of Samoa and implementation at the sector level is already taking place.

As an example, the expected outcomes for Samoa's Five Year Education Sector Plan (2019-2024) support SDG Goal 4: "To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" and also aligns with the Pacific Regional Education Framework's

four policy areas. In particular, the Samoa Education Sector Plan has five priority areas namely, inclusive education, early childhood education, TVET, ICT, and capacity development of staff.

Finally, Madam Director-General, our social, cultural, and human development challenges are ever increasing due to Climate Change. I wish to highlight the need for strengthened presence of UNESCO in the Pacific.

The Pacific Region is an Ocean State with island countries, geographically scattered far and wide. It needs the support of UNESCO to promote and support its Pacific Regional Education Framework. Doing so complements the current effort by UNICEF in supporting Early Childhood Development to ensure the Pacific Region is not left behind.

The Pacific Region can do more through UNESCO and UNESCO can achieve more by building its strength in the Pacific.

The Government of Samoa will soon move the UNESCO Office for the Pacific States to a rent-free premise to support the Organization.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge efforts of the UNESCO Secretariat – in particular, the UNESCO Apia Office to assist us improve education and strengthen culture as well in Samoa.

May God Bless You All

Soifua.