

Sobering reality of triple planetary crisis at forefront of Pacific Environment Ministers Talanoa

08 September, Apia Samoa - The sobering reality of climate challenges threatening the existence of Pacific communities have been brought to the fore of the 31st SPREP Meeting Environment Ministers High Level Talanoa at Taumeasina Island Resort in Samoa, on Friday.

“Every day my country is losing ground physically and literally,” said Tuvalu’s Minister for Public Utilities and Environment, Honourable Ampelosa Manoa Tehulu, who is also Chairing the meeting.

“The reality is that they are talking about digital nations for our people. Can you imagine that? I am sitting in this meeting thinking about this reality. We are scared but not afraid. Today, I want us to have a meaningful discussion about this reality.”

The impassioned plea from Hon. Tehulu set the scene for the Ministerial Talanoa, bringing together Pacific Environment Ministers to discuss ways to help Pacific communities survive the impact of the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Samoa’s Minister of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE), Hon. Toeolesulusulu Cedric Schuster, welcomed all the Environment Ministers to Samoa and wished them well in their deliberations.

“On days like this, we must ask ourselves, why are we here?” Hon. Toeolesulusulu said. “Some of us are here to listen, some of us are here to learn, some of us are here to share, some are here to sell something but no matter what you’re here for, I hope that by the end of our session, and as you return to your country, that you will take something back with you that will help feed your family, your village, your constituency and your country.”

Hon. Toeolesulusulu said that it’s important Ministers walk away from the Talanoa in Samoa better equipped to tell to the world about “our plight, our concerns and our aspirations as Pacific people to continue to exist in our homelands.”

“We are the custodians of the biggest ocean and all that it involves but we are also amongst the most fragile and most vulnerable environments and we are here to learn and work together,” he said.

“We must build better and stronger alliances to ensure our goal of 1.5degree world is not breached, and lead us into a future we can leave our future generations.”

Minister Toeolesulusulu also urged the Ministerial talanoa to be bold in amplifying the One Pacific voice on global platforms which exist to tackle the environmental challenges threatening Pacific countries.

“We need to push the bigger countries to provide the 100 billion needed to implement the Paris Agreement. We need to push the bigger economies to provide the 20 billion and the 100 billion required to implement the Global Biodiversity Framework,” he said.

“More importantly for the Pacific, we need to ensure we access these finances where they are available, and that we are able to utilise them to build our capacity, to provide the resources we need to implement the national plans that we have toiled in the last 30 years to develop.”

The 31st SPREP Meeting of Officials and associated meetings started on Monday with SPREP’s Partnership Dialogue, the 31st Meeting of Officials, and concludes with the Ministerial High-Level

Talanoa on Friday. All meetings are guided by the theme: “SPREP @30th Sustainable, transformative and resilient for a Blue Pacific.”

The meeting is taking place at a time when SPREP is celebrating its 30th Anniversary. Minister Hon. Toeolesulusulu congratulated SPREP and thanked the Secretariat for organising the meetings.

“We must address the triple planetary crisis by our own personal actions, our homes, our offices, our constituencies, and our countries. We need to start at home before we begin to tell others what they need to do.”

On Thursday night, Hon. Toeolesulusulu hosted an ava ceremony as part of Samoa’s welcome for the Ministers, during a week when the nation is celebrating its Teuila Festival.

The Director General of SPREP, Mr Sefanaia Nawadra, said SPREP is delighted to have been able to convene the first High Level Ministerial Talanoa since COVID-19.

“I thought Minister Toeolesulusulu asked a very good question about why we are here,” said Mr. Nawadra. “We are here because we want to keep our Pacific environment intact, we want to build a resilient Pacific environment so that we can have something we can hand over to our children and grandchildren who will come after us.”

The Ministers’ High Level Talanoa opening session also featured the Regional Director and Representative Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific for UNEP, Ms Dechen Tsering, who highlighted the plight of the Pacific countries who are at the forefront of climate change impacts and related challenges.

Reverend Nu’uausala Siaosi Siutaia, of the Apia Protestant Church, opened the meeting with a devotion.

The 31st SPREP Meeting of Officials and associated meetings are taking place at Taumeasina Island Resort in Samoa this week, from 4-8 September 2023. The meetings are guided by the theme: “SPREP@30th Sustainable, transformative and resilient for a Blue Pacific.”

The 31st SPREP Meeting of Officials and associated meetings bring together SPREP’s 20 Pacific Island Member countries, 5 Metropolitan Members and partners to discuss strategic issues pertaining to the organisation, and to approve the 2024-2025 work plan.

The 21 Pacific Island Member countries and territories of SPREP are: American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna. The five Metropolitan members of SPREP are: Australia, France, New Zealand, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

In our efforts to fulfil our vision of ‘a resilient Pacific environment, sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures’, SPREP is extremely grateful to our valued Members, development partners, donors, our CROP family, and stakeholders.

For more information on the 31SM, please contact: sprep@sprep.org