

## COUNTRY STATEMENT - Tonga

Esteemed President,

Distinguished guests

Ladies, and Gentlemen,

1. I am deeply honored to address you today, as a representative of the Kingdom of Tonga, and acknowledge the enduring partnership between our country and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) that dates back to 1982. This longstanding collaboration has been instrumental in our resolute efforts to confront the challenges of rural poverty and food insecurity.

2. On behalf of our Kingdom and our Pacific counterparts, we extend sincere gratitude to IFAD for **fortifying its presence in our region** by establishing its office in Fiji. This pivotal step has facilitated our engagement, enabling strategic discussions and joint visioning sessions critical for adaptive management in our highly delicate context.

3. Underscoring our unwavering commitment in partnering with IFAD in advancing our national development objectives, I am pleased to announce Tonga's **pledge of USD50,000** and payment for contributions to the IFAD 13 **initiative**. This tangible demonstration of our commitment will further solidify our partnership and enable us to address collectively the challenges confronting our rural communities.

4. We express our earnest interest in embarking on a new collaboration with IFAD, leveraging the forthcoming **IFAD 13 funding cycle**. Inclusion in the programming of IFAD 13 offers Tonga a valuable opportunity to enhance our efforts in rural development and agricultural sustainability.

5. Considering this, I respectfully request IFAD's support in **mobilizing additional resources**. This includes funding from the Green Climate Fund, leveraging IFAD's accreditation, as well as assistance from the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program, and other esteemed development partners. These resources will help to amplify the impact of our agricultural initiatives, fortifying the resilience of our rural communities and enhancing their food security in the face of climate change.

6. I extend heartfelt gratitude to IFAD for its steadfast support in Tonga, particularly in enhancing the resilience and livelihoods of rural communities

across the outer islands. IFAD's **flexibility**, demonstrated through portfolio recalibration, has enabled us to respond effectively to recurrent natural disasters supporting recovery processes by rebuilding food systems and restoring livelihoods.

7. Shifting our focus, I am honored to partake in a dialogue on "Innovation for a Food-Secure Future in the Pacific." While the Pacific islands encounter unique challenges in achieving food security, they also present opportunities for innovation and transformative change.

8. Our Government, in collaboration with IFAD, has successfully championed the Tonga Rural Innovation Programme, recognized as a best practice across the Pacific region. This initiative has leveraged proven approaches that empower local communities, strengthen grassroots capacities, promoting **community driven-development**, and focus on the most vulnerable.

9. Innovation serves as the linchpin in unlocking new solutions and pathways towards a food-secure future in the Pacific. From sustainable agriculture practices tailored to the unique environmental conditions of our islands to the utilization of technology and digital solutions, innovation offers promising avenues to enhance food production, distribution systems, and community empowerment. Social and economic innovations play a pivotal role in ensuring food security in the Pacific. By fostering entrepreneurship, promoting inclusive value chains, and bolstering local food systems, we can unleash the potential of local communities to become more self-reliant and food secure.

10. IFAD and our Government have collaborated closely to promote **sustainable agricultural practices**, including facilitating smallholders' access to farms and home gardens and promoting the production and consumption of locally produced nutritious food. This inclusive approach strengthens smallholders' resilience and coping mechanisms during shocks, contributing to the **reduction of non-communicable diseases**. As of now, our collaborative investments have allowed us to reach 80% of the communities in our Island Kingdom.

11. Collaboration and partnerships are indispensable for fostering innovation in the Pacific. By uniting stakeholders from diverse sectors, we can create synergies, share knowledge and resources, and catalyze collective action towards the common goal of food security and resilience.

12. Together with IFAD, we have championed the dissemination of **climate-resilient crop varieties** and introduced new crops, leveraging partnerships with gene banks and expertise from centers of excellence. The Tonga Rural Innovation Programme has played a pivotal role in **conserving indigenous trees and plants** in Tonga and the wider region.

13. More recently, in partnership with IFAD and support from the Government of the Republic of Korea, we have used **digital solutions** to develop the Tonga Food Security Dashboard. This innovative tool enhances access, ownership, and understanding of national data and supporting evidence-based policy decision-making on food security.

14. In conclusion, I reaffirm Tonga's unwavering commitment to our partnership with IFAD and our collective efforts to promote rural development, food security, and resilience in our nation and the broader Pacific region. Let us embrace innovation as a cornerstone of our endeavors towards a more prosperous and sustainable future for all.

Malo 'aupito