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IPU General Debate Statement
by the Speaker of Legislative Assembly of Tonga

Honourable Chair

Honourable Speakers of Parliament

Heads of Delegations and Members of Parliament

Ladies and Gentlemen

Chair, I am extremely Honoured to attend this 148th IPU Assembly in Geneva on behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Tonga a Small Island Developing State. On the theme of *Parliamentary diplomacy: Building bridges for peace and understanding*, I wish to highlight like many of my fellow speakers before me the greatest threats to peace and understanding; and that is *geopolitical conflict and climate change in-action*.

In opening my remarks, I acknowledge that the absence of total peace in our time is due to the persisting unilateral acts of violence and violations of international law by both state and non-state actors, often with impunity due to a lack of accountability within our existing international rules-based order. The double standards witnessed in the treatment of perpetrators of violence, supported by states that turn a blind eye to realities on the ground and double standards, undermines our collective drive and ambition for lasting peace. Evidently, one can conclude the existing mechanisms and pledges for peace and security enshrined in the United Nations charter are grossly inadequate today, as we slip into a time of multiple conflicts across multiple continents. I commend the

efforts lead by the previous speaker from Liechtenstein on proposed reforms in the Veto Initiative.

In framing the call for peace, I recall the United Nations 1984 Declaration on the Right of Peoples to Peace, and I quote, "Appeals to all States and international organizations to do their utmost to assist in implementing the right of peoples to peace through the adoption of appropriate measures at both the national and the international level."

We as parliamentarians have a sacred duty to uphold peace for our peoples through resolutions of our parliaments and in holding our governments accountable for their actions.

However, our Peace is not only under constant threat by geopolitical conflict causing loss and damage to public & private property, forced migration, death and suffering but also by climate change induced extreme weather events felt around the globe brought about by the human activity of releasing harmful greenhouse gases into our atmosphere.

Honourable Chair and fellow delegates, our planet is heading in an unprecedented trajectory of self-destruction and as the leaders of our governments and parliaments we are partly to blame. Whereas I place my trust in the democratic systems that underpin our shared values in the IPU, trust in the rules based international order designed to protect our nations and people from harm is wavering. A lack of international ambition and commitment will result in global temperatures overshooting the Paris Agreement target of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels this year. Fellow delegates, are we capable of saving ourselves from future hardships? The planet is changing in front of our very eyes,

the time to act is imminent before it is too late. Last year was a year of records for all the wrong reasons; it was the warmest year ever recorded, we saw unprecedented ocean heating, accelerating sea level rise, worst glacier retreat on record, largest loss of Antarctic sea ice, drought afflicted millions, flooding afflicted millions¹ and these records are only the start of exceedingly more frequent and more severe records to come if we do not act now.

What can we do as parliaments? In closing, I propose the following 2 actions:

1. Promote the urgent decarbonizing of our energy systems into renewables or nuclear. Part of the challenge with the wide-spread adoption of renewables is the subsidized cost of fossil fuels with our own tax dollars. Obscuring the true cost of coal, gasoline, diesel, and gas. In 2022 according to IMF, there was a total of \$7 trillion¹¹ in fossil fuel subsidies. Taxpayers funding fossil fuels both explicitly & implicitly and this number is expected to grow if we continue to do nothing. The true cost of the resulting air pollution is estimated at 8 million¹² deaths a year. The direct cost to health is \$2-4 billion¹³ a year. However, we as policy makers are ignoring the true cost of negative externalities to the environment, people's lives, and sustainable development.

Therefore, 2. We must phase out all fossil fuel subsidies and phase in pricing externalities so that markets respond appropriately, by realizing the true value of our environment and the true value of human health. Only when and if there is a global consensus, on putting a real value on nature will the political will to act finally align with climate action.

Thank you.

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-right-peoples-peace>

* <https://wmo.int/publication-series/state-of-global-climate-2023>

* <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/climate-change/energy-subsidies>

* <https://www.bmj.com/content/383/bmj-2023-077784>

* <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>