



GENERAL DEBATE

153rd Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly

5-9 October 2026

Arusha, Tanzania

Prepared for: Hon Fane Fotu Fituafe

Minister for Internal Affairs and People's Representative for Tongatapu

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Legislative Assembly of Tonga

President of the IPU, Your Excellency Dr. Tulia Ackson

Honourable Speakers, Members of Parliament, General Secretary of the IPU, Colleagues and Friends

1. Mālō e laumālie. I bring warm greetings from the Kingdom of Tonga, and I thank the Government and people of Tanzania for their gracious hospitality.
2. For us, good governance is not only about institutions, laws and policies. It is also about people and relationships. Our Tongan values of faka‘apa‘apa, respect, fatongia, responsibility, and tauhi vā, nurturing our relationships, remind us that leadership carries a responsibility to listen, serve and ensure everyone has an opportunity to participate.
3. I speak today not only as a Minister, but as an elected representative and currently the only woman elected to Tonga’s Legislative Assembly. I carry that responsibility with pride, but also with recognition that we must continue opening pathways for women’s leadership and participation. Our decisions are stronger when the people they affect have a meaningful voice in shaping them.
4. Madam President, this year Tonga ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a significant milestone nearly nineteen years after signing it. Our National Policy on Disability Inclusive Development 2025–2035 now provides a framework for stronger legal protection, accessible services and meaningful participation by persons with disabilities.
5. Our inclusive education programme demonstrates what inclusion can mean in practice. Beginning with just nine children in a pilot class in 2007, it has since expanded to other schools. For a child and their family, access to education can change the course of a life. That is the kind of tangible outcome against which we must measure our progress.
6. We are also advancing participation through our Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality Tonga III Policy and National Youth Policy 2026–2030, alongside Parliament’s Youth and Women’s Parliament programmes, creating further pathways for participation, leadership and public service.
7. As Tonga prepares to host the 2031 Pacific Games, we also have an opportunity to ensure this national undertaking benefits our young people

and communities, while promoting sound governance, accountability and accessibility from the outset.

8. Madam President, laws and policies provide an important foundation, but they are not enough on their own. As Ministers and Parliamentarians, our fatongia is not simply to ask, “What laws have we passed?” but “Whose lives have improved because of them?”
9. For Tonga, our greatest strength has always been our people, our families, our communities and the relationships that hold us together. Good governance must strengthen those relationships, build trust and ensure those facing the greatest barriers are not left behind.
10. When Government, Parliament, civil society and communities work together, we strengthen not only our institutions, but the people those institutions exist to serve.
11. Malo ‘aupito.