



Statement by
Honourable Sevenitini Toumoua, Minister for the Ministry of Infrastructure of the Kingdom
of Tonga

at

At the second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United National Human
Settlements Programme (5-9 May 2023)

United National Office at Nairobi (UNON)
Kenya

Government of the Kingdom of Tonga delegations:

Head of delegation: Honourable Sevenitini Toumoua, Minister for Infrastructure

Delegation: Dr Vinolia K. Salesi, Acting CEO-Infrastructure

Delegation: Mr Tevita Lavemai, Director for Lands and Transport

Mr President, Excellences, Distinguish delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great honour to address this assembly on behalf of the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, as we partake in the Second Session of the UN Habitat Assembly 2023. We are deeply grateful for the constant efforts of the UN Human Settlements Programme and for organizing this vital event.

Before us is a critical and crucial theme, “*A sustainable urban future through inclusive and effective multilateralism: achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in times of global crises.*” The recent unprecedented global crisis COVID-19 pandemic and accelerated actions of the climate changes highlighted the importance of the collaborative and united efforts to address these challenges in a smarter and sustainable manner that will help deliver timely strategies to uphold UN’s call to support sustainable urban future. We must unite to find the way forward in an equitable multi-lateral system and a cooperation fit for purpose, fit for the future and respectful of our differences but united by our shared desire for an inclusive, and sustainable urban future for all.

Tonga strongly supports the UN Human Settlement Programme. Tonga had embedded into our national priorities through the Tonga National Development Framework (TSDF II) the priorities for the UN Human Settle Programme. Priority development areas includes the urban and rural development, human development with gender equality, infrastructure and technology, land and environment and climate. There are key challenges that are impacting the housing issue in Tonga such as housing affordability, access to suitable land, security of tenure, access to quality building materials and skilled labours. As such Tonga has established the ‘Government Affordable Housing Scheme’ targeting 3.1% (578 households) extreme poverty group’ to provide much needed support for the most vulnerable families in Tonga. Additionally, Tonga established the Housing Recovery and Resilience Policy – Building a Resilience Housing Sector for Tonga to improve the housing standards, resilience and environmental friendly building materials as roadmap to addressing these challenges.

However, the devastating impacts of the Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Gita in 2018 and multiple crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, the Hunga-Tonga Hunga-Ha’apai Volcanic eruption and tsunami in 2022 intensified the aforementioned challenges. Several islands were completely or severely destroyed. Our people were displaced and then evacuated to neighbouring islands. Tonga with the support of its development partners supported multi-dimentional resettlement and recovery projects for these communities. It includes relocating of the affected families, rebuilding of 286 recovery houses (Hunga-Tonga Hunga-Ha’apai project); 8 resilience houses (Habitat New Zealand project); and the post-Gita housing recovery project to name a few.

Mr President, we conclude by reiterating Tonga’s support for your important work. We are confident that the recommendations and outcome documents of this year’s assembly will lead to more robust partnership to address the challenges before us to hope for present and future generations. May God guide and bless this UN Habitat Assembly and all its members, observers, and staff in our shared journey during this session to the destination of finding solutions through solidarity and sustainability.

Thank you.