

## COOK ISLANDS

### HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY, ROME, 3-5 JUNE 2008

Statement by Hon. Jim Marurai,  
Prime Minister of the Cook Islands

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Greetings to your Excellencies, distinguished Leaders and delegates, and representatives.  
Special greetings and gratitude to Director General Diouf, and the FAO, for your untiring efforts in organising and convening this most important gathering.

The Cook Islands values very highly the relationship it has with the FAO, so we take this opportunity to acknowledge the importance of this conference and the spirit of action in which the member countries have gathered here.

Over many years in our part of the world, the FAO, along with others like the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, have formed valuable and stabilising partnerships in terms of our land management capabilities, sustainability of our crops and fisheries, the development of crop-resistance to viruses, and our rehabilitation efforts in the wake of natural disaster. Food Security programmes forms an integral part of our cooperative links.

In fact, the Cook Islands has presently engaged the FAO in what we consider to be a ground-breaking first – the development of a private-sector-led aqua-farm that merges renewable energy and environmentally-sound technology with high value yield in diverse fish products – an important model in which to package food security principles in small communities.

However, as a Small Island Developing State, the Cook Islands joins its fellow countries from the Pacific Region and beyond, to echo the sentiments of serious concern over the issues and tasks we face here, as Leaders, as Governments, and as people.

After all, Mr. Chairman, what sort of world have we become where we can receive images and data from cyberspace at an incredible speed into a device that we can hold in our hand – and yet – so many of us are not able to ‘download’ the nourishment we so dearly need into our own bellies from the earth below our feet and the sea within our reach?

In the global 'food chain' of nations, the Cook Islands is no different from its friends and neighbours. Scattered over millions of square kilometres of ocean, we would be amongst the smallest nations of this earth to be devoured by harmful trade practices, rising costs of fuel, shifts in food supply, adverse climate change and natural disaster.

In this chain of events, so often inflicted by the relentless march of globalisation, our local food production has been pressured under a declining agriculture sector. Major shifts have occurred as the country vies for economic opportunities in tourism growth, while struggling with outward migration trends, and debilitating export constraints.

The cruel irony underlying a seeming island paradise is that concentrated economic success can, and does mask much deeper, broader problems linked to food and wealth distribution, as well as an increased vulnerability beneath the tug-of-war over fuel prices and alternative energy, and the endless cycle of adverse climate conditions, including sea-level rise.

At some point, we too may well be stricken by a severe breach of our food security. Already, valuable tuna species in the Pacific now require the utmost safeguarding in sustainable management – or our people and those of our region face dire consequences as a result of distant water fishing nations indiscriminately plundering our resource.

To whom do we turn? if not to a community of concerted action provided us by membership to this most important organisation – then where?

Mr Chairman, it is our spiritual belief that God made Man and this Earth.

It is our belief that God performs the impossible.

But in between God and the impossible – there WE stand – to call upon each other to do whatever we can that IS possible.

Just as our small island communities are strengthened by the principles of a close-knit family, so too do we call upon this family of nations to do whatever is possible to alleviate the crises, which have befallen, and continue to threaten, the developing world and its security.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

