

**OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER**

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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***SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF TONGA***

FOR

WORLD STATISTICS DAY

TUESDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2020



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Hon Minister of Finance, Hon Cabinet Members  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps  
Members of Parliament  
Invited Guests  
Ladies and Gentleman,

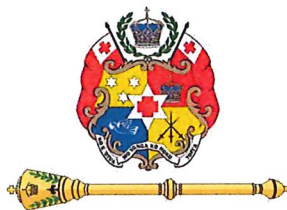
[Acknowledge students and essay writers from the schools]

[Congratulate the Tonga Statistics Department for the successful completion of Tonga MICS and encourage government and parliament to use for policy intervention]

I am deeply honoured to address you all this morning as the keynote speaker for World Statistics Day 2020 the theme being Connecting the World with Data We Can Trust. World Statistics Day, initiated by the United Nations on this day back in 2010 aims to raise public awareness and build trust in official statistics, and to promote the work of statisticians throughout the world. Commemorated every 5 years, Statistics Day was celebrated on 2010, 2015 and today we gather here in 2020.

This year's theme 'Connecting the World with data that we can trust' reflects the importance of trust, authoritative data, innovation and the public good in a national statistical system. So as we celebrate the World Statistics Day today, we are joining the World in advocating for all decisions, particularly those that impact people, must be evidence base. Hence based on trusted (meaning data that is accurate and timely), authoritative (data must be used) not only in policy decisions but also on well designed work programs for targeted people in need throughout Tonga.

Today we not only recognise and acknowledge the importance of timely, accurate and relevant statistical data, but we must accept, that statistics must inform decisions that impact the lives of the people of Tonga. It is a powerful tool to assist policy makers, decision makers, businesses and households alike in these challenging times. During this period of the Novel Coronavirus pandemic, we heavily rely on statistics to track the status of the pandemic, and its economic and social impact. I believe that we now have a higher appreciation for statistics as it informs us on the most appropriate response to the pandemic. We are now all too familiar with COVID statistics, such as total cases vs. today's cases, total deaths vs. today's deaths, numbers for recovered and critical cases... statistics that vary in magnitude from country to country, region to region and we are very blessed in Tonga to be one of only 11 countries free of COVID-19 (zero cases, zero



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deaths, zero recovered and zero critical cases). A statistic that we can all be proud of maintaining, however this is in stark contrast to another health statistic, in 2020 we are the second most obese country in the world with a national average of 31.9 for Body Mass Index and with that NDCs follow. Departing from health, Tonga's ranking for ease of doing business from 2018 to 2019 has deteriorated from 91 to 103 out of 190 countries. On the political front, about half of the youth voters between 21-34 neglected to vote in the 2017 general elections. This statistic alone has lead me to develop Tonga Youth Parliament every year leading up to the 2021 general elections. Policy makers and businesses must be equipped with good statistics to ensure planning and policies address the needs of Tonga directly.

I am pleased to know that the Statistics Department is taking the lead role, in coordinating the compilation and reporting of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Tonga Strategic Development Framework (TSDF) indicators. This means that, the report on the Statistical Progress of our SDGs presented today is of great importance in ensuring that policies are meeting initial aims and identifying areas that require improvement.

Since 2018, the Statistics Department has been establishing a National Statistics System according to National Strategy for development of Statistics and I urge the government to empower the full implementation and collaboration of the National Statistic System. Picture this... Where our Prime Minister is the captain of our ship and His Majesty the King owns that ship, every passenger and crew has a purpose to serve as an important cog in the machine that is Tonga. In my opinion, the statistics department is a very powerful tool at government's disposal. They not only take count of how many souls are on board our ship, they also inform us how much food is left on our journey and how many can't afford food to survive, on a macro level they also take count of where we are in relation to where we are heading.

Decision-making based on current and reliable information is the only sensible way to make decisions that impact everyone's lives and that is why Statistics are not only required but are crucial for sustainable development and meeting the challenges of our time.

The numbers don't lie.

Malo 'aupito