

Committee on the Rights of the Child  
Eighty-fourth extraordinary session, 2 – 6 March 2020



Opening Address by  
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Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division  
  
Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General

Taumeasina Island, Apia (Samoa)  
2 March 2020

*Reverend Motu Mounga, Chair of the National Council of Churches  
Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child,  
Distinguished members and in particular our friend the Samoan member Acting Chief Justice  
Vui Nelson,  
Deputy Director General of the Pacific Council  
Representative of international and regional organization and civil society  
The Ombudsperson of Samoa  
Children,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*Talofa!* On behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, it is a great honour to be here as part of the official opening of this Eighty-fourth Extraordinary Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

*Chair,  
Distinguished members,*

This is an historic and groundbreaking moment for the history of United Nations human rights treaty bodies. For a long time, stakeholders and beneficiaries, including Governments and civil society organizations, have been asking to have meetings of treaty bodies closer to where they live. The Chairs of the treaty bodies in their most recent meeting in June of 2019, identified ‘review in the region’ as one of their priorities for the future of the treaty body system. They agreed “that there are considerable benefits in conducting dialogues with States parties concerning their reports at a regional level”. So here we are!

The Pacific region has been indeed the most adversely affected region by its remoteness from Geneva. Since 2016, six of the seven reviews of the Committee on the Rights of the Child with States from the Pacific region were conducted via video-link. The participation of civil society organizations was extremely limited. No children from the Pacific, not one, the Committee’s main beneficiaries, were able to come to Geneva to meet with the Committee. It is quite extraordinary, the Committee on the Rights not able to meet with children. So I am so very happy that we will see so many of them during the course of this week.

Now that 13 members of the 18 member Committee are here in Samoa, it will review as was mentioned three countries, the Cook Islands who I am happy to see in the room, the Federated States of Micronesia and Tuvalu who are also coming or present, and will be able to hold interactive dialogues directly with the high-level and multi-sectoral delegations from these countries in the next days. It will also be discussing what we call the lists of issues concerning Kiribati in preparation for its dialogue with that State, at present slated for September. The Committee will also have the benefit of meeting with civil society organizations and national human rights institutions coming from a number of Pacific States covering the region. And, as I mentioned they will most importantly be able to interact with potentially hundreds of children from Samoa and other States. Two big events are in fact dedicated to them: one later this morning following the opening session and one on Friday in celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Equally, the Committee shall be present for the Spotlight initiative led by the European Union in relation to violence against women and girls.

The Committee will have the opportunity to also meet with UN agencies and regional organizations to hear about and discuss issues affecting children in the Pacific. As you see in the programme, there are Talanoa-style lunch-time events every day, where children will participate including moderating some of them. This is novel to this region I understand, but

that's part of the process of coming here; and we heard from the Prime Minister about the events that have taken place in preparation for this session. Value for money. Furthermore, this 84<sup>th</sup> session will provide a unique opportunity to all those participating, including State delegates, representatives of the judiciary, representatives from civil society organizations and national human rights institutions, to attend various parallel events held in the Regional Rights Resource Team Talanoa tent to learn more about children's rights, including child participation, the human rights processes such as the Universal Periodic Review and the work of the United Nations Special Procedures. And I invite you to go these because albeit they are very distant processes but they can have a positive and direct impact on your work. All of this, the whole package, would simply not have been possible in Geneva. Impossible in fact.

*Reverend,  
Mister Chair,*

This session, in the Pacific, represents a special occasion to create momentum for strengthening co-operation and partnerships in the Pacific with regard to children's rights. We are confident that this regional session, and all the process for organizing it, and it wasn't a light process - it was time consuming - will encourage everyone involved to increase their efforts to protect the rights of all children in the Pacific. And to think about the proximity of victims to the Committee. They cannot come to Geneva. The aim of this regional session, and hopefully of future similar sessions in other regions of the world, and I will not hide that this is part of the goal of the process, is to make the children living in that region more visible and aware of their rights and ensure that these rights are effectively promoted and protected.

In this regard, we are infinitely grateful firstly to the Pacific Community and its Regional Rights Resource Team and in particular I want to pay tribute to Miles Young and Ashley Bowe and those with whom they work very closely for and its donors – Australia, Sweden, New Zealand and the United Kingdom – for making all this a reality. *Fa'afetai* to the Honourable Prime Minister and his government for hosting the Committee here in Samoa and for the Government's warm welcome and support. And we really felt a team effort since the day of our arrival. And again *fa'afetai* to the Samoan member of the Committee, Acting Chief Justice Vui Nelson, for his invaluable support and useful lessons of Samoan and your rich tradition and culture and trying to teach us a few words with appropriate pronunciation (so I am no quite sure I have yet scholared and mastered that). Also I wish to thank our partner the civil society organization Child Rights Connect which is well represented at this session and helped guide us on child participation. I wish to extend my truly deep appreciation to the Resident Coordinator in Samoa, Ms. Simona Marinescu and her Office for their passionate support. Over the course of the year when we have been planning this the Resident Coordinator and I have been like family and we are very sorry she is not here and our thoughts are with her. And I also want to pay tribute to the Regional Offices of the Pacific for UNICEF and OHCHR for their assistance and presence here today. Without all of you we would not be here today. It was a team effort. But that is what the United Nations should be about, working with each other and with others outside of our UN family. And I want to thank you Reverend for gracing us with your presence this morning and your welcoming prayer.

I need to pay tribute to Allegra Franchetti, Chanmi Kim and Omer Yalcin who are here and they were part of a four member team from OHCHR – only four of us were working on this preparation - for all their hard work and dedication. We all wish you a very productive session and are very much looking forward to the week.

Thank you.