



KEYNOTE SPEECH HON. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER,
AFIOGA TUALA IOSEFO PONIFASIO
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 5TH FORUM
FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES
MILLENNIA HOTEL, FALE SAMOA
THURSDAY, 18/07/2024
AT 9:30AM

Rev. Ma'auga Motu, Secretary of the Union of Churches in Samoa,
His Excellency the Australian High Commissioner to Samoa,
Representatives of Government Ministries, the Private Sectors
and Civil Society Organizations,
Representatives of Organizations of persons with disabilities,
President of the Nuanua o le Alofa Youth Committee,
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am honored to deliver the keynote address on behalf of the Honorable Head of State and Masi'ofa of Samoa, the Hon. Prime Minister of Samoa, Cabinet Ministers and everyone else of the Independent State of Samoa, to officially open the "5th Youth Forum" for youth with disabilities on the theme, **"Shaping Young Leaders Through Technologies"**.

Samoa ratified the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2016. Articles 4, 9, 19, 20 and 26 of the present Convention call on all State Parties to:

- Take the necessary measures to guarantee persons with disabilities the rights to access appropriate technologies in all forms.
- Invest in/ ensure the availability of universally designed technologies for all including persons with disabilities.
- Adopt legislative measures to ensure technologies are available, accessible and most of all affordable to all persons with disabilities in order to support them to live independently on an equal bases with others.
- Assistive devices/technologies can range from physical products such as wheelchairs, glasses, prosthetic limbs, white canes, and hearing aids to digital

solutions such as speech recognition or time management software and captioning.

Most people who use assistive technology use more than one product, making integrated services important.

Today's gathering is a living testimony of how the Government with its partners and through its many efforts promote, make available and recognize the critical role of technologies as an enabler to:

- Ensure individuals with disabilities are included in education, employment, fitness, leisure and other everyday activities such as self-care, cooking and reading.
- Ensuring early detection and provision of hearing aids for young children to support their development of language and communication skills, limiting negative impacts on their education, future employment and community participation.
- Providing appropriate wheelchairs through the Mobility Device Services Unit of the Ministry of Health, to facilitate mobility, improving individuals' access to education and employment while reducing healthcare costs due to a reduction in secondary complications such as pressure sores and contractures.
- Availability of therapeutic footwear for diabetes at MDS to reduce the incidence of foot ulcers, preventing amputations and the associated impact on individuals and burden on health-care systems
- Improve the participation of persons with disabilities through Nuanua o le Alofa and affiliates in the development of National related policies and legislations.

However, we can not ignore the multiple barriers experienced by our youth such as the inadequate technologies that are accessible, and affordable to meet the diverse needs of individuals.

The lack of assessment to inform appropriate technology.

The limited knowledge of youth with disabilities on what is available and how to access them.

Therefore, I trust that the deliberations of the next 2 days will provide a platform to converse, learn, build networks on how to enhance access and availability of technologies for persons with disabilities in Samoa and beyond, noting that their full and effective participation and inclusion at all levels of developments is of paramount.

Soifua ma ia manuia !!