

Statement by

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to the United Nations**

On Behalf of the Pacific Small Islands Development States

at the

Thematic Discussions on “**Rural Development**”
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On Sustainable Development (CSD-16)

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(Please check against delivery)

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Pacific Small Islands Developing States (PSIDS) comprising Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, the Kingdom of Tonga.

We wish to associate ourselves with the statement made by Grenada on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States.

At the outset, we would like to thank you for convening this meeting on the thematic issue of “rural development”. Rural development is an important issue for the Pacific SIDS since most of its population lives in rural areas, and relies mainly on agriculture, forestry and fisheries as a source of livelihood. Poverty in our region is with few exceptions, largely a rural phenomenon. Rural development has to be given priority if the Millennium Development Goals are to be met by 2015.

Mr. Chairman,

Rural development is a key to gender empowerment, improvement in education, and health for our region. Poverty, particularly rural poverty contributes directly to malnutrition, and it exacerbates gender discrimination.

Rural development for Pacific SIDs is a real challenge in that in most cases we are not talking about a rural area in one country but several, even up to eight hundred islands scattered over vast areas of ocean in regard to one country.

The approach to rural development has to be taken as an “integrated approach” if it is to make any lasting impact on the lives of the rural population. The “integrated approach” should encompass infrastructure including roads, airports, wharves; access to utilities including electricity, solar and other renewable energy sources; access to social services including water sanitation, and healthcare; building human capital, education and training, in particular for girls and women; the need for affordable/reliable energy; affordable and regular transportation between outer islands; as well as the development of other sectors of the economy.

The sector wide approach is also important to ensure that all services are provided to curb and mitigate urban drift/urban population increase, which causes a strain on the infrastructure of the urban areas, as well as contributing to other social problems.

In my own country, we have adopted the “integrated regional development approach”, which encompasses the development of a comprehensive all sector wide plans for the four main island regional groups. A donor was nominated as the core donor for each of

the regional groups, and to be complemented with other donors, and private sector sources of national funding. The first “integrated regional development programme” was commissioned in 1976, and we have built on the lessons learned from this approach with the remaining programmes.

The long term commitment to human and financial resources required to tackle the socio-economic challenges of rural development are enormous, and beyond the capacity of our economies to address.

Although Overseas Development Assistance continues to be the main source of financing for “rural development” efforts in the Pacific SIDs, over the last decade, the total amount of ODA directed towards rural development has declined from 16% in the 1990’s, to 4% in 2005.

Since 2005, several donors as well as other financial institutions have worked on a “rural strategy” for our region. We commend these efforts, and encourage the continuation of focus on this important area.

Mr Chairman

In conclusion, the Pacific SIDs reiterates that rural development has to be given priority in order to achieve the MDGs. We take this opportunity to urge that continued focus and attention and resources are devoted to rural development. We believe that the challenges we face are also opportunities to positively reshape the path of our development.