

Statement by

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to the United Nations

On Behalf of the Pacific Small Islands Development States

at the

Thematic Discussions on “**Agriculture and 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 "agriculture and rural development". There are clear linkages with "agriculture and rural development" in Pacific SIDs given that the agriculture sector is still a major player in our economies; and that the bulk of agricultural activities is farmed and produced in the rural area. Any developments and progress in the agriculture sector will also be translated into benefits to the rural population.

The fisheries sector is also a critical sustainable development issue for the Pacific SIDs. Several of the atoll states in our region have limited land resources, but vast marine resources. The challenges facing the region includes further developments of national fishing industry and the necessary infrastructure, technical, and financial support required; the negative development impacts of by-catch/discards, illegal/unreported fishing and overfishing, and this is directly related to "inter-generational equity" for SIDs. There are many options available for progress in this sector including supporting cooperative market opportunities for subsistence fishermen/community aquaculture, as well as partnership/joint ventures with distant fishing or market nations.

Mr Chairman,

The natural limitations of our economies limit the scope and development of economies of scale production of our agricultural produces. Factors such as limited population, geographical distances from major markets and limited access to finance and technology play a part in confining our region to being predominantly rural and agricultural based.

There needs to focus attention on providing an enabling environment to improve agricultural yield and output for both domestic consumption and for exports. Support is therefore needed to improve infrastructure including access to agricultural plots (agricultural roads); access to markets including

improved transportation; water; research and development; technical staff to help support and build local capacity.

Mr Chairman,

The impact of climate change will also affect the rural population in terms of greater hardship caused by more frequent and more intensive tropical cyclones, sea level change that will impact small low lying atolls and high temperatures which will facilitate the spread of diseases such as dengue fever. These events are exacerbated by the rapid increase in the prices of imported food and fuel, basic necessities for every day life.

Mr Chairman,

Small and medium enterprise development programmes is also crucial for sustainable growth of Pacific SIDs. The availability of financing through micro-finance and micro-credit schemes is also vital.

Several of our development partners as well as regional and international financial institutions have embarked on programmes supporting agriculture and rural development. Such programmes have the objective of reducing rural poverty in the region by overcoming the disadvantages of isolation by enabling rural communities to enhance their livelihood opportunities and improve food security and social cohesion. It improves access to basic services and resilience to natural calamities, and promotes equitable access to productive natural resources and technology. Priority is also given to the most vulnerable within these communities.

Much more needs to be done however in terms of increasing the level of resources in order to strengthen and intensify the level of coverage of these programmes.