

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF FIJI,
COMMODORE VOREQE BAINIMARAMA, AT THE PLENARY
SESSION OF THE THIRD WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT (RIO+20)**

**RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL
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Your Excellency Madam President,

First may I congratulate you as Chair of this World Summit, for the warm hospitality extended to my delegation since our arrival in Rio and for the kind invitation to attend this Third World Summit on Sustainable Development.

It is with sincere appreciation that I recall Fiji attended the World Summit on Environment and Development convened 20 years ago here in Rio. It was at that meeting the Special Case for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) was agreed to by the international community. That decision resulted in the international meeting in Barbados in 1994 which in turn resulted in the Barbados Programme of Action for Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

Twenty years on, I can today reaffirm that for Fiji and its people that in our continued efforts to strive towards sustainable development, the "special case" still applies. Recent global events such as the financial, fuel and food crises have served to underscore this reality, together with the adverse impacts of climate change, climate variability and sealevel rise.

In 2010, the Fiji national assessment for the 5-year review of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for SIDS, along with similar national assessments for our island neighbours found that since 1992/1994 our vulnerability has increased whilst capacity to cope has not.

Madam President,

Fiji continues to face significant and mounting challenges in a number of key areas, including: developing and maintaining effective and adequate human capacity for development; developing and maintaining cost effective infrastructure to engage with the global community and its markets and to support socio-economic priorities; establishing and maintaining viable and diversified economic development bases and value added industry; securing foreign investment; securing affordable, adequate and safe energy supplies; protecting biodiversity and shared resources; and, in accessing adequate resources to effectively reduce risk to disasters including climate change.

Fiji, I know is little different from its island neighbours in regard to these significant and mounting challenges. It is in this context I want now to turn to a concept that I believe if re-invigorated today would help us in the Pacific islands region further develop and strengthen our ability to work better together in an integrated manner towards the goals of sustainable development. I refer to it as the “Pacific Way”.

The Pacific Way is a concept in the Pacific islands region that has been around for several decades. Indeed Fiji's first Prime Minister, the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara is often attributed as being the source of the concept which in due course gave name to the title of his autobiography, 'The Pacific Way'.

The Pacific Way concept whilst never well-defined, today I believe points Fiji and its island neighbours to the path down which we need to venture together for the Future We Want.

For Pacific islanders, the Pacific Way invokes dialogue and working together to share attributes such as: our island heritage, independence, right to self governance. Furthermore, the Pacific Way invokes working together in an integrated holistic manner, establishing effective communications, retaining social networks, and working together towards achieving economic development, and sustainable resource use of our environment. To achieve the Future We Want, Fiji seeks the support of our partners. Fiji understands it cannot achieve its sustainable development goals in a timely manner alone. **But I must stress that Fiji needs support from its partners and not interference or attempted control.**

Madam President,

Before moving to some specific references to Fiji and its pathway to sustainable development, let me share a few thoughts on the uniqueness of the Pacific SIDS region. I refer of course to the vast Pacific Ocean. The Pacific Ocean singularly gives rise to much of our vulnerability through generally being groups of small, if not tiny, islands scattered in isolation. Yet its shared resource use is the opportunity it presents to us to contribute towards sustainable development.

Fiji and its island neighbours, are and will continue forever to exist in the Blue World, of the Pacific Ocean. It comprises over 95% of our sovereign territory and over which we have stewardship in the interest of the Global Commons. Socially, the context of widespread small communities on generally small often tiny islands provided, and still largely does provide, the basis for our traditional and cultural social fabric. The ocean feeds us (and a large part of the global community), it endangers us (cyclones, storm surges, and tsunamis), and underpins the challenges we face (isolation from markets, high cost of imports and exports, cost of internal transport) and opportunities we have for economic development (tourism, fisheries, seabed minerals).

Beyond our Exclusive Economic Zones over which we have sovereignty there are vast High Seas areas of our planet Earth over which international organisations hold significant responsibility. I wish to make specific reference to one, the International Seabed Authority with responsibility for the seabed areas of the High Seas. Fiji is the current President of the Assembly of the ISA and we recognise particular interest being shown at this time in the seabed mineral resource potential of the High Seas.

For sure Fiji has keen interest in exploring the economic opportunity seabed mineral resources have to offer, I know Fiji shares this interest with other island neighbours and the application of Rio Principle 15 calling for a precautionary approach must underscore all our efforts to investigate and if possible utilise in an acceptable way the resources on the seabed of not only our EEZs but also the High Seas.

Madam President,

Let me now turn to a few particular comments on Fiji. In 2008, we launched a new strategic way forward for Fiji entitled; "The Peoples' Charter for Change, Peace and Progress". Its eleven pillars and contained principles embed and cross-cut all the three pillars and principles of sustainable development with a focus of reducing poverty. Fiji is I believe working towards, albeit slowly as circumstances may dictate, the achievement of the Charter.

For many in Fiji, and I believe the region, in the context of social well being, the definition of poverty has been problematic. This is closely linked to the problem of capturing the essential caring and sharing and traditional social-safety net structure of the extended family with the high dependence on subsistence fishing and farming as a basis for food security. Over recent years I am aware that dialogue at all levels has produced a working definition of poverty in the Pacific islands region which reflects these essentials and focuses on "hardship".

Poverty in Fiji as it results in an inadequate level of sustainable human development, is manifested by: a lack of access to basic services such as health care, education and clean water; a lack of opportunities to participate fully in the socio-economic life of the community. a lack of access to productive resources and income generation, and support systems (rural credit capital, markets, skills) to meet the basic needs of the household, and/or customary obligations to the extended family, village community and/or the church.

These very real issues linked to the need to develop and strengthen social well being, often linked to poverty in Fiji, including hardship and lack of opportunity, seem to me to be lost in the current outcomes document which has a poverty focus more related to abject poverty and hunger.

Madam President,

I have to acknowledge that we cannot control the vagaries of Mother Nature. In January and March of this year once again for Fiji, the weather set back many years of effort towards achieving sustainable economic and social development by government, the private sector, communities and individuals alike in our Western Division. The livelihood secured over a working lifetime of effort by many cane farmers and their families was destroyed.

On two occasions only two months apart, and within a matter of hours on each occasion, torrential rain and associated flash flooding and landslides occurred. A lesson to be learnt is we simply must develop and strengthen our early warning capability at all levels.

Beyond response and recovery to these disasters Fiji must continue to strive to put in place more effective early warning systems that is underpinned by better ongoing scientific and technical data gathering, better information products, leading to more knowledge to better inform policy and decision-making.

As a final sectoral issue I must highlight the energy sector. Whilst Fiji is blessed with hydropower as an abundant source of renewable energy with which to generate electricity, we are still very heavily dependant on imported fuels to service our transportation needs and in particular the tyranny of distance and current global fuel costs that seriously and negatively impact on the viability of inter island transport whether it be by punt and outboard motor or interisland ferries, or the development of our national fishing capability.

Madam President,

I have dwelt upon three aspects: (i) social well being and poverty, (ii) the need for better use of scientific and technical data to support sustainable development and (iii) transportation costs and dependency on imported fuels, that appear as far as Fiji is concerned to get less than adequate attention or indeed are missing from the current Rio+20 outcome document.

Let me now highlight that many elements of the current text appear very relevant to Fiji and reinforce the issues we have to be contend with in Fiji. I refer in particular to the elements on agriculture, fisheries, forestry, water, health, tourism, biodiversity, human settlements to name but a few.

Madam President,

Fiji has a relatively small population of around 900,000. Together with addressing the challenges to develop and strengthen our education system and minimise the "brain drain" that migration brings we are still left with a limited national capacity (both human and

institutional). In many instances there is a flow-on effect that manifests itself in less than optimal absorptive capacity for us to maximise the timely use of support offered by our partners.

Madam President,

In closing, let me thank you for the opportunity on behalf of Fiji and its people to address this plenary gathering of the Third World Conference on Sustainable Development. There is no doubt for Fiji that the special case of SIDS, agreed to in Rio 20 years ago, has evolved and should remain a key reflection in the Rio+20 outcome document "The Future We Want". I note in the Rio+20 Outcomes the proposal for a Third International Meeting on SIDS in 2014. I would like to put on the table the offer from Fiji to host this important meeting. In making this offer I would like to give all delegates the assurance that we will do our utmost to welcome you all to our shores around the middle of 2014.

Madam President I thank you.

Vinaka vakalevu.