



Intervention

The Republic of Vanuatu

**The United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable
Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine
resources for sustainable development**

Partnership Dialogue 3: Minimizing and Addressing Ocean Acidification

**Delivered by the Hon. Seremaiah Matai NAWALU, Minister of Agriculture,
Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Bio-security**

(New York, 6 June 2017)

Co-Chairs,

Excellencies;

Distinguished representatives,

I have the pleasure to deliver my brief intervention on behalf of the people and the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate the two co-chairs on your appointments. You have my delegation's full trust and confidence.

Co-Chairs,

The ocean forms an important part of our natural and cultural heritage. For Pacific Islanders, this gives rise to a unique and intrinsic relationship between our people and the ocean. For thousands of years, our people have relied on the ocean for its healthy, nutritious food, as an economic driver, for job creation, for safe movement and a place for safe recreation.

But over time, marine resources have become susceptible to human induced activities and impacts, diminishing their health, productivity and resilience. Marine pollution, overfishing, climate change, global warming among other factors have drastically increased the susceptibility of coastal and marine resources.

Co-Chairs,

I have no doubt in my mind that ocean acidification has very serious consequences for marine life especially those that require calcium carbonate to thrive. This has dire consequences for species that rely on them for food having serious ramifications of the food chain. Ocean acidification is a direct consequence of increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations. As the largest carbon sink, the ocean absorbs the bulk of carbon emissions. The result of increasing carbon dioxide concentrations is a demonstrable decline in the pH of the ocean causing serious harm to coral reefs, fish and shell-forming invertebrates.

Co-Chairs,

At current carbon dioxide emission rate, coral reefs and marine ecosystems will very likely be severely affected by the mid-21st Century most notably through the decline in marine food supplies exerting pressure on food production and security. It is a serious concern for SIDS especially as significant portions of our populations depend on the ocean for protein, human health and wellbeing let alone survival.

Co-Chairs,

We recognize that the only practical solution to alleviate ocean acidification is to reduce the build-up of carbon dioxide. This means taking the Paris Agreement on Climate Change seriously and delivering on the Nationally Determined Contributions each country has pledged.

Co-Chairs,

We are of the view that maintaining a close vigilance of the changing marine chemistry is crucial and we applaud and are inspired by the many international scientific research and monitoring efforts with regards to ocean acidification. But what concerns us is the accuracy and timeliness of measuring and monitoring marine chemistry, a process that is technology intensive and costly. Many Small Island Developing States including Vanuatu lack this type of technology that allows up-to-date information on the changing chemistry of the ocean surrounding us, hindering useful policy direction.

Co-Chairs,

Addressing ocean acidification is everybody's business as it affects everyone. The geographic expansion of existing monitoring and research is therefore necessary to effect critical and informed policy decisions.

Given the limited focus of existing research in the Pacific region, we wish to suggest mainstreaming of research and monitoring efforts in sub-national, national, regional and international programmes which could include a regional system devoted to the collection and dissemination of data including targeted research on the impact of ocean acidification on key species critical to strengthening the socio-economic wellbeing of small islands. This will require strong partnership and collaborative approaches given the complexity of this challenge.

I am pleased to inform this august gathering that in the spirit of partnership and collaboration Vanuatu, only last week, formally engaged bilaterally with the IAEA to consider and commence potential activities to address ocean acidification in our country that entail research, technical assistance and capacity building. From a regional approach, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community also formally engaged with the IAEA to consider a regional programme of activities to address ocean acidification in the Pacific. We welcome more of such partnerships.

Co-Chairs,

In conclusion, it is obvious that we need to employ a three-pronged approach to addressing ocean acidification if we are to achieve the sustainable development goals we have set ourselves. Urgent interventions are required at the international multilateral level, research and monitoring level and immediate action on the ground.

At the international multilateral level, we need all key stakeholders to advance the Paris Agreement given that ocean acidification is inextricably linked to carbon dioxide emissions. We must not turn our backs on the principal of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.

At the technical research and monitoring level we need to adopt a one ocean approach where no regional ocean is left behind. A one ocean approach will foster a true concerted effort towards linking science with policy and resilience building through informed decision making. Finally, if we are to give our oceans a fighting chance, immediate action is necessary on the ground to address the existing stressors that further increase the vulnerability of our oceans and ocean eco-systems.

We believe the stepping stone to a new sustainable development pathway for our oceans is partnership – existing partnerships that need to be strengthened and new, genuine partnerships that need to be forged, for our ocean, for human kind and for all life on Earth critical to our very existence.

I thank you.