

Statement by

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to the United Nations

On Behalf of the Pacific Small Islands Development States

at the

Thematic Discussions on “**Land Management**”
During the Sixteenth Session of the UN Commission
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 just made by the Solomon Islands 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 "land management". Land is integral to the people of the Pacific SIDS in their social, economic and political relationships and as a source of identity. Most Pacific SIDS land is customarily owned, and land tenure issues are politically sensitive. Land has also been at the core of several local conflicts in the Pacific.

Mr. Chairman,

Agricultural and forestry resources are important sources of food security, and other competing development priorities in other sectors of the economy are leading to the loss of arable agricultural lands to housing, tourism developments and industries in the Pacific SIDS. The competing demands for land for agricultural production is often exacerbated in the Pacific SIDS countries by the systems of leasing land from absentee landowners.

The Pacific SIDS also continue to face ongoing challenges in regard to land degradation and other environmental impacts including land management techniques that result in erosion and use of agrochemicals that have impacted on water quality and ecosystems.

The ongoing threat of climate change and its projected impact on land degradation through sea level rise is an added challenge that must be addressed by Pacific SIDS.

Mr Chairman,

Appropriate participatory approaches need to be expanded to strengthen land governance systems and ensure that land continues to support economic growth and employment and protects important ecosystem functions such as watershed management. Any effort to "improve" the land tenure system must also respect traditional cultural systems as there are positive potential benefits of traditional cultural land systems for community based development.

Whilst national governments focus on ways and means to deal with the real challenges posed for the utilization, access and management of land, our Leaders have also committed to dealing with this complex issue at a regional level under the "governance pillar" of the Pacific Plan. Ten studies have been commissioned under a "Land Management and Conflict Minimisation Project", which will result in the completion of a comprehensive analysis identifying ways to strengthen land tenure systems amongst the Pacific SIDS that will minimize future conflict and facilitate economic development.

Mr Chairman,

We urge the international community to continue to work closely with the Pacific SIDS to address the challenges regarding land management.

Thank you.