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Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Public Service, Peoples Charter for Change and Progress, Information, i-Taukei Affairs, Provincial Development, Sugar Industry, Lands and Mineral Resources

Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) CLOSING STATEMENT

Sheraton Fiji Resort Wednesday 7th August, 2013

DENARAU 12:00PM

Heads of Governments;

Honourable Ministers;

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Private Sector and Civil Society Representatives;

Observer Delegations;

Senior Government Officials;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula vinaka and a very good afternoon to you all.

This inaugural Pacific Islands Development Forum has been an outstanding success.

We came together for the first time as Governments, territories, civil society groups and businesses to confront some of the development and environmental challenges we face as Pacific Small Island Developing States.

For this first summit, we chose as our theme “Leadership, Innovation and Partnership for Green-Blue Pacific economies”.

And as it draws to a close, we can confidently say that we have achieved our objectives.

We have shown leadership by acknowledging and embracing the challenge posed to all of us, of unsustainable development and its consequent threat to the welfare of our islands and our people.

We have discussed ways in which we can confront those challenges with solutions that are innovative, practical and affordable.

And we have forged an unbeatable partnership in which governments, civil society groups and businesses can work together for the common good of our people.

Our people look to us to work cooperatively and effectively to try to resolve our gravest crisis – the increasing threat to our environment, the health of our ocean and the health of our land. And at this conference, I believe that we have risen to the challenge. We have not let them down.

We cannot pretend that easy solutions are possible but we can report to our people that we are finally working together to find them.

And we’re doing it in the Pacific Way – through consultation and consensus.

Our final outcomes will bring together the various strands of our discussions over the past three days into one rallying statement and blueprint for the future.

But simply put, we have already succeeded in the objective I laid out on Monday - building the foundations for a new regional framework of cooperation, solidarity and friendship.

Now I ask you all to play your parts in consolidating some of the ideas that have been aired here and turning them into practical action.

We have had some wonderful presentations and I would like to thank all of the speakers for their contributions and ideas.

Each of these is a block in the new structure we are building to take our region forward.

Many of you will be wondering where we go from here.

Well, I’m delighted to make an important announcement. My fellow leaders and I have agreed to formally establish a Secretariat of the Pacific Islands Development Forum.

I’m equally delighted to say that Fiji offered to host the Secretariat and that offer has been accepted.

On behalf of every Fijian, I want to thank our fellow Pacific Islanders for the confidence you have shown in us.

We are deeply honoured by the trust you have placed in us and pledge to make every effort to ensure that this important new regional initiative is a success.

Work will commence immediately on setting up the Secretariat to maintain the momentum of these discussions. A working group comprising all of the stakeholders – governments, civil society groups and business - will map out the way forward.

Initially, we envisage that the new Secretariat will be housed in Suva in the former headquarters of the Fiji Film and Video Unit in Domain Road.

It will be funded initially by Fiji and staffed by representatives of government, civil society groups and business from the PIDF region.

Further details will be announced in due course but I can assure you that the PIDF Secretariat will be very different from the Forum Secretariat.

We have no interest in establishing a competing bureaucracy. Indeed my fellow leaders and I agree that our guiding philosophy will be the antithesis of most bureaucracies -“less is more and more for less”.

The Pacific doesn’t need expensive facilities. We need results.

The Pacific doesn’t need an army of overpaid officials. We need committed, publically-minded individuals ultilising scarce resources to maximum effect.

The Pacific doesn't need any more top-down solutions. We need to harness the common sense of our people at the grassroots, listen to them as we identify their needs, and work up.

And so my fellow leaders have agreed that we will start modestly, expand only when required and live within our means.

I’d like to pay special tribute to those countries outside the region that have already pledged significant amounts to finance our vision.

I have had meetings with some of them during this Forum and have been delighted with their enthusiasm for the PIDF.

I also want to thank our civil society groups and businesses for the enthusiasm they have displayed during these deliberations.

You have long sought a voice in existing regional forums but have been rebuffed.

Now, you have a voice and that voice is being listened to. You finally have a partnership with government and from our stand-point, that partnership is highly valued.

And so Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, we move forward with a new, inclusive organisation to give voice to our aspirations, designed for Pacific Islanders by Pacific Islanders.

We acknowledge that there are some governments still to be convinced about the worth of this initiative. But they are welcome to join us.

Certainly, I would ask all of you here who’ve regarded this Forum as worthwhile to convey your experience to a wider audience, whether by the customary Coconut Wireless or the media - social and mainstream.

And so the curtain comes down on the First Pacific Islands Development Forum.

There will definitely be a second – at a time and place to be announced – and we look forward to seeing you all there.

As we go our separate ways after today, I’m reminded of what Winston Churchill famously said after the allies won the Battle of El Alamein: Quote:

“This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning”. Unquote.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are closing the first chapter here today as we return to our homes but will gather again to write the rest of the story. And we leave this place in the sure knowledge that we have started something worthwhile.

Thank you all for coming and making this a wonderful success.

Vinaka Vakalevu.

Thank you.

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