**

**COMMODORE JOSAIA VOREQE BAINIMARAMA, CF(Mil),OStJ,MSD, jssc, psc**

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

**OPENING STATEMENT AT THE PACIFIC SIDS REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Radisson Blu Resort Wed. 10th July, 2013**

**NADI 1000 Hours
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

***Mr Wu Hong-bo – Under Secretary General for the United Nations Economic and Social Affairs and Secretary General of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States;***

***Your Excellency John Ashe – incoming President of the UN General Assembly;***

***Mr Sun-ichi Murata – Deputy Executive Secretary UN-ESCAP;***

***Heads of Pacific SIDS Delegations;***

***Pacific SIDS Ambassadors to the UN.***

***Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;***

***Representatives of Major Groups;***

***Ladies and Gentlemen.***

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all,

On behalf of the Fijian people and Government, it’s my privilege as Prime Minister to convey the warmest of welcomes to both our country and this important gathering.

I extend a special welcome to our international guests, who I hope will be able to see more of Fiji and its unique attractions during your stay.

Late last night, I arrived back in Fiji after visiting Solomon Islands as Chief Guest at the celebrations to mark the 35th Anniversary of the country’s Independence.

It was naturally a great occasion for Solomon Islands but it was also another important reminder to me about the ties that binds us as Pacific Islanders and what we can achieve with unity and purpose.

Where once we were obliged to rely on outsiders to assist with our development, we are increasingly assisting each other. And where once our concerns were ignored, we are increasingly asserting our right to be heard.

Just as Fiji is proud to have been able to offer its assistance to Solomon Islands, we are proud of have taken a lead role in the formation and development of the Pacific Small Island Developing States.

It has given us all a new voice - a stronger voice - at the United Nations to advance the agendas that matter most to us, like the urgent need to address climate change.

As you all know, we are here this week as Pacific countries to prepare for a global gathering of Small Island Developing States in Samoa next year.

This three-day Pacific Preparatory Meeting is one of four across the world leading up to the Third International Small Islands Developing States Conference in September 2014.

One has already been held in Jamaica and two more will be held in Seychelles and Barbados later this year.

 We have an agenda that ranges across the issues of vital importance for Small Island Developing States – climate change, dealing with natural disasters, poverty alleviation, the proper management of resources, human trafficking, the need for better governance, better social protection and the preservation of traditional cultures and practices.

I want to commend the contributions of the co-organisers of this meeting: the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

We deeply appreciate your excellent partnership with the PSIDS Missions in New York, and the work you are undertaking in the preparatory process.

Over the next three days and with the pressure of time that is upon us, we need to formulate some concise, focussed, forward-looking and achievable positions that represent the views of the Pacific Small Island Developing States.

These will be taken to the Inter-regional Preparatory meeting in Barbados in August; and ultimately the Third International Conference in Samoa next year.

It will not be an easy task but Fiji is determined as Chair to deliver our objectives by managing these proceedings in a manner that is firm but fair.

As many of you know, The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development known as Rio+20 called for the convening in 2014 of a third international conference of Small Island Developing States. It recognised the importance of co-ordinated, balanced and integrated action to address the sustainable development challenges facing these countries.

The 66th Session of the UN General Assembly set down four objectives for the Samoa global gathering:

\*To assess the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of two key SIDS initiatives thus far - the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation.

\*To seek a renewed political commitment by all countries to effectively address the special needs and vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States by focusing on solutions that are practical and pragmatic.

\* to identify new and emerging challenges and opportunities for the sustainable development of Small Island Developing States and ways and means to address them.

This includes strengthening collaborative partnerships between SIDS and the international community; and finally -

\* To identify priorities for the sustainable development of SIDS for consideration, as appropriate, in the elaboration of the UN development agenda post 2015.

These are the high benchmarks that will guide our deliberations here in Fiji.

 We have great challenges to overcome. The Draft Pacific SIDS Regional Synthesis Report highlights the lack of progress in our region towards achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

It speaks of *"doing things differently rather than doing different things"*, as the way we should all move forward.

As someone who keeps urging Fijians to *“think outside the box”* when it comes to problem solving, I heartily agree with this sentiment.

Perhaps the greatest brain of all time, Albert Einstein, once said: *“Insanity is doing the same things over and over again and expecting different results”.*

*Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen*: Permit me to issue a challenge to you all for your discussions this week.

Be bold. Don’t just accept conventional wisdom. Strive to be imaginative. Think of new ways we can do things.

The people of our region deserve better outcomes than they currently face. We must never forget that we are their servants. We need to provide them with good governance, strengthen our institutions, create regional frameworks that place their interests first.

When we created the Pacific Small Island Developing States, we recognised that banding together to present a united front for the region at the UN was the best way to be heard, to gain achievable outcomes that promote sustainable development. We wanted to be imaginative, to think outside the box.

From here this week, the good ideas that come from our own experiences will be taken further, culminating in the global festival of ideas in Samoa next year.

As Pacific Islanders, let’s show the other Small Island Developing States that our ideas are worth adopting, our voices are worth hearing. That they eventually become solutions that improve the lives of people living in SIDS countries the world over.

This is Fiji’s objective for this Conference - the pursuit of policy excellence for the benefit of ordinary people not just in the Pacific but any small island state;  the Pacific Small Island Developing States punching above their weight, taking proposals to Samoa that are imaginative, practical, affordable and sustainable.

We may be small, we may be comparatively vulnerable but that doesn’t mean that we can’t also be smart.

We also need political will to push our agendas forward, to persuade the international community as a whole of the urgent need to address our most immediate challenges.

We are currently witnessing the world dragging its feet on the need to tackle global warming.

Let me say this to the big polluters – the big carbon emitters:  Whatever the science of climate change, it is you who must respond to global warming, which threatens the very existence of some of our Small Island Developing States.

You need – for our sakes – to set targets to curb your carbon emissions. Because the majority scientific opinion has it that you are causing global warming.  And we are seeing dire effects in the Pacific from rising sea levels and more frequent extreme weather events.

It is not good enough to say *“it is all too hard”*, to put the protection of your own carbon-emitting industries first. It’s time for you to place yourself in the position of a citizen of Kiribati, one of the Small Island Developing States whose very existence is under threat.

As they watch their islands sink, Kiribati has been forced to buy 6000 acres of higher ground in Fiji. We welcome them as neighbours and friends. But for the industrialized countries to put themselves first, to let a whole nation sink slowly beneath the waves, is bound to be regarded by future generations as the height of selfishness.

So we expect the industrialized world to face up to its responsibilities, and also to bear the cost of whatever consequences flow from their activities.

We are not the carbon emitters, they are. So when we suffer adverse consequences, such as more frequent destructive hurricanes, we believe they should shoulder more of the cost.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, The draft Pacific Regional Synthesis Report which has been prepared by ESCAP is now before us. Our own National Assessment Reports are part of these deliberations. Fiji has called its report: ‘*Accelerating the Integrated Approach to Sustainable Development’*. It summarises our vision for the way forward, which includes addressing the issue of good governance.

To this end, Fiji has embarked on a series of major reforms to guarantee better outcomes for our people. Principal among these is the Elections next year that will give Fiji its first genuine parliamentary democracy next year of one person, one vote, one value. That Elections will be held before September 2014, coincidentally the same month as the Samoa global SIDS gathering.

For my part, I hope for a happy coincidence - a successful election in Fiji that is free, fair and transparent and an outcome in Samoa that advances the cause and gives renewed hope to the millions of ordinary men and women in the Small Island Developing States.

And so Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, with these few words I again welcome you to Fiji and wish you well in your deliberations.

The next three days are bound to be challenging but I also hope they will be stimulating and productive.

Thank you for your attention. Vinaka vakalevu.