**HON PM BAINIMARAMA CLOSING REMARKS AT WORLD OCEAN CONFERENCE**

**6/10/2017**

Your Excellency my Co-Chair, the Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden.
Your Excellency the President of the UN General Assembly,
Your Excellency the Secretary General of the United Nations,
My fellow Heads of State and Heads of Government,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bula vinaka and a very good afternoon to you all.

I can honestly say on behalf of every Fijian in this room that this has been one of the greatest weeks in our nation’s history. The honour of joining our great friends from Sweden in co-chairing the World Ocean Conference. And to witness the strong commitment of the community of nations to support us in our crusade to protect our oceans and seas.

We came here playing a role far more ambitious than a nation of our size can expect to play under normal circumstances. But as we all know, these aren’t normal circumstances. Our oceans and seas are under unprecedented threat. And I want to thank the world for giving a Small Island Developing State such a big voice as Co-Chair of this conference to amplify our collective concerns. And to begin rolling back the tide of neglect and willful destruction that has placed our oceans and seas in such dire peril.

We were determined to inject these proceedings with the Fijian spirit and the warmth of our islands through the performances of our musicians, singers and dancers. They have done Fiji proud. And I know because many of you have told me so that they have made this conference a unique event in the history of the UN.

Thank you, Mr Secretary General, for your own warm response at the opening ceremony when you expressed your personal appreciation and respect for Fijian culture. The entire room was impressed as you fulfilled your own obligation to down a large bilo of kava in one hit.

There’s a lot more kava waiting for you in Fiji when you come to visit us, which we very much hope that you will do before too long. Just as I invite every single one of you in this great auditorium to come to Fiji with your families to experience our very special brand of hospitality.

I want to place on record our deepest appreciation to the President of the General Assembly and all UN staff for the great effort you have made to make us all feel welcome and make this conference a success.

My special thanks goes to my distinguished Co-Chair, the Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, for a wonderful collaboration this week. We might come from opposite ends of the earth but we share the same commitment and I think we made a great team. Certainly, it has brought Sweden and Fiji and the other Pacific nations closer together, just as our close collaboration with Germany on COP23 is building bridges across the world between Germans and Pacific islanders.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, there is no question that we have made great strides this week in drawing global attention to the urgent need for action on our oceans and seas. And this is reflected in the large number of formal commitments that have been made, which have now reached more than one-thousand, three-hundred (1,300) and rising. This is more than double the number at the start of the week. And is a clear indication of the outpouring of support for decisive action that this conference has generated.

I want to warmly thank those governments, non-government organisations, UN agencies and the private sector for joining us with these undertakings to help improve the state of our oceans.

The largest number of commitments have come from governments at 44 per cent, NGOs 19 per cent, UN entities 9 per cent and the private sector 6 per cent.

The North Atlantic is the ocean basin with the most commitments so far, followed by my own region - the South Pacific. Across the targets, marine ecosystems have the most commitments followed by pollution and scientific knowledge and research.

Even after the conference closes, the register will remain open. So I urge the world to keep those commitments coming in. Whether you are a small NGO or a large country, every commitment matters. Because in the sum total is the key to substantially improving the state of our oceans and implementing SDG 14.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am particularly encouraged by the outcome of the 6 Partnership Dialogue this week, that produced all sorts of innovative solutions and I think we can all agree was an unqualified success.

It underlined the critical importance of a partnership of governments, civil society, the scientific and academic communities and the private sector all working together on a holistic approach to our oceans. Which as we all know, in the only way to effectively deal with this crisis. Along with the support of all 7.5 billion people on earth.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, we have come together as one world this week in defence of our oceans. And now it is also time to turn our attention to the simultaneous challenge of climate change - the urgent need to come together in a grand coalition for climate action and uphold the Paris Agreement of 2015.

As you know, Fiji has the dual honour this year of not only hosting the Ocean Conference but presiding over COP23 in Bonn and November. I want to pay tribute today to the great work that Morocco has done as President of COP22. And I give a solemn undertaking that when Fiji assumes the presidency in November, that we will carry out our own mandate on behalf of every person on earth, and especially those in vulnerable countries the world over.

Of course, this includes Fiji.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, the stakes come November cannot be higher now that the Trump Administration has abandoned the Paris Agreement. The wonderful thing is that so much of America remains standing shoulder-to-shoulder with us in support of decisive climate action. But COP23 will still be an important opportunity for the world to reaffirm its commitment to the Paris Agreement and I appeal to you all for your support. Because there is one fundamental truth above all others. That we cannot improve the quality of our oceans without addressing the threat of climate change. The two are interlinked. Indivisible.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, I again thank those that have made this gathering possible -the President of the General Assembly, the UN Secretary General, the Secretary General of the Conference and the Co-Facilitator of the Call for Action.

And vinaka vakalevu to all of you for making this such a successful and memorable gathering. The entire world taking a stand in defence of our oceans and seas.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you. And moce mada. Goodbye.