**HON PM BAINIMARAMA OPENING ADDRESS AT THE CLIMATE ACTION PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP EVENT**

**7/3/2017**

Your Excellencies my fellow Pacific Island leaders,
The Honourable Deputy Prime Minister of New Zealand,
The Honourable Australian Minister for International Development and the Pacific,
The Chair of the CAPP event - our Climate Champion, the Honourable Inia Seruiratu.
Distinguished representatives of governments and regional organisations,
Representatives of civil society and the private sector,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

The next 48 hours are an extremely important opportunity for us all, as we come together to do what we can, here in the Pacific, to advance the global climate action agenda.

We face an unprecedented threat to our way of life from the rising sea levels, extreme weather events and changes to agriculture brought about by climate change.

No one living in the Pacific can be left in any doubt about what is at stake. As the incoming President of COP23 - the ongoing UN climate negotiations - I still get some people saying to me: Why are you doing this? Why are you spending so much time travelling the world when you have a job to do in Fiji? And my simple answer is this:

As Pacific Islanders, we are fighting for our very survival. For all we hold dear. For all that God has given us and has been entrusted to us by our forebears to care for and pass on to generations to come. And for some of our number, their very existence as sovereign nations with land and coastlines hangs in the balance.

I want to particularly welcome and honour the leaders of two of our neighbours who are most at risk - President Maamau of Kiribati and Prime Minister Sopoaga of Tuvalu.

Excellencies, you carry the grave responsibility of trying to save your nations and your peoples from existential threat - the prospect of the islands you love and the resting place of your ancestors disappearing beneath the waves altogether.

Of all the vulnerable nations of the world, you are the most vulnerable. Of all the moral force we can muster to remind the world of its obligations, you have the greatest moral force of all. Because to allow sovereign nations to slip beneath the rising seas altogether to preserve the economies and lifestyles of others would be an act of unparalleled selfishness and injustice. And any global citizen who believes in justice has no moral choice other than to side with you in your struggle.

On behalf of everyone in this room, I ask you to convey to your people that we rededicate ourselves to that struggle today. We are with you. We are doing everything we can to stand up for you in the great forums of the world. We will never abandon you, just as we will continue to fight for justice for every single vulnerable person on earth.

And even if the battle to keep your islands above the water is lost, we will continue to stand shoulder- to-shoulder with you. Fiji has offered to give permanent refuge to the people of Kiribati and Tuvalu, our closest neighbours under threat. And we expect the United States to do the same for the people of the Marshall Islands - who share your plight - because of their long-standing historical ties.

In a worst-case scenario, we know that there will be climate refugees throughout the world. But the people of Kiribati and Tuvalu will not be refugees. We Fijians will embrace you and take you into our homes and our hearts. That is our solemn promise to you as Pacific neighbours and friends. And we ask other countries to offer the same hospitality to anyone who is displaced by climate change. Because ultimately, we are one world, one people. And as the new French President said so aptly the other day: there is no plan B other than decisive climate action because there is no planet B.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I also offer a special welcome to our distinguished guests from our larger neighbours - the Honourable Paula Bennett, the New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Climate Change Issues and the Honourable Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, the Australian Minister for International Development and the Pacific.

I often say that our best chance of achieving lasting change in any sphere is to tap the energy and resourcefulness of our women. So it is wonderful to see the leadership role that these two women are taking on the issue of climate change. We in the Pacific Islands look to Australia and New Zealand for leadership in helping us to highlight our own challenges. And we very much hope that both countries can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the PSIDS leaders by supporting the position we adopt here and throughout Fiji's Presidency of COP23.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, in this room today are the various Pacific elements of the Grand Coalition I am helping to forge across the world as incoming COP President to step up the momentum for climate action. Representatives of governments, regional organisations, civil society and the private sector - all focused on the huge task that lies before us.

We are not pointing our fingers at the rest of the world and saying “it is your responsibility to solve this problem”. We recognise that it is the collective responsibility of every global citizen to contribute to a solution.

In this spirit of collective responsibility, I was honoured, on Fiji's behalf, to formally endorse the "Under2 Coalition" and appoint the Governor of California, Jerry Brown, as my Special COP23 Envoy to the States and Regions. This important initiative has mobilised nearly 180 sub-national governments around the world to do their part to tackle climate change. And you will hear from Governor Brown shortly.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, today we bring together some of the best minds, biggest investors, and most committed climate action campaigners in our own region to examine what we can do. A fresh exchange of ideas, a search for innovation, for solutions that we can pursue here in the Pacific that can be part of a global solution. And that can even inspire others to pursue greater ambition and action elsewhere.

As many of you already know, this Climate Action Pacific Partnership Event - CAPP - is part of the program of activities of the High Level Champions appointed under the Paris Agreement. They include our own High level Champion, The Honourable Inia Seruiratu - Fiji's Minister for Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster. And I want to warmly thank him for the energy and commitment he is bringing to this role.

Our agenda over the next two days includes a number of interactive sessions with contributions from Pacific leaders, civil society and the private sector. All of you have a great deal in the way of skills, knowledge and experience to add to our collective ability to design solutions to the challenges we face.

As incoming COP President, I want to stress the importance of three basic principles as we examine the various options.

First, any potential solutions we embrace must be transformative. They must be able to make a real difference and be game-changers.

Second, they must also be practical and affordable enough to be embraced on a greater scale. So that something that works in Fiji can also work across the Pacific.

And finally, they must be able to be replicated. Something innovative that happens in one community can also happen in communities across the region.

After my speech here this morning, I'm going to open something that ticks all of these boxes - one of the biggest companies in Fiji, Coca-Cola Amatil, embracing solar energy to help power its local plant in Nasinu. Almost 4000 solar panels have been installed across almost 11-thousand square metres of roof space to generate 40 per cent of the site's energy requirements. The plan is to take this to 80 per cent and extend the solar program to plants in Lautoka and Labasa. But already, the company is saving 415-thousand litres of diesel every year, along with 975 tonnes of carbon.

I certainly encourage other companies and investors to follow this lead. Because it's a practical and highly effective way in which the private sector can make its own contribution to the fight against climate change.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, as we embark on our discussions this morning, I want to emphasise the critical importance of teamwork, not only within nations and regions but the entire world. The various strands of the grand coalition each of you represent must be fully committed to working collaboratively together and be totally focused on the mission ahead.

I have said before that we are all in same canoe, not just the island nations but the whole world. No-one is immune to the effects of climate change. All 7.5 billion people are in the same boat. And to symbolise the critical importance of the “one world” concept, we are going to have an ocean-going Fijian canoe - a Drua - in the main foyer in Bonn when we gather for COP23 itself in November. There'll be a taste of this when another Drua sails past us here at lunchtime. And I hope you all enjoy the spectacle.

It is to remind everyone that we need to fill our sails with a collective determination to move the climate agenda forward. To not only maintain the course that was set in Paris at the end of 2015 - to fully implement the historic agreement we reached - but speed up the process. Because if we don't, the world - and especially our precious island homes - face certain catastrophe.

We all know the challenge the world faces because the American Government has abandoned its leadership on this issue. But we must do whatever we can to encourage America to resume that leadership. The door is always open to President Trump. But in the meantime, we must support those Americans who remain committed to climate action. And we must fortify every other nation to stay the course.

So on behalf of us all, I want to send the strongest possible message to the leaders of the G20 Group of Major Economies - including President Trump - who will gather for their summit in the German city of Hamburg later this week.

Please do not abandon us, we in the Pacific who are among the most vulnerable to climate change. Please commit yourselves to showing solidarity with vulnerable nations around the world. Whether it is embracing more decisive climate action. Or giving developing nations readier access to adaptation finance and insurance that builds greater resilience and cleaner economies. Or to work more closely with the private sector and investors to do both.

To the leaders of the G20: We have not caused this crisis, your nations have. As our opening prayer this morning put it, we have trodden lightly on the earth whereas you have trodden heavily. And those carbon footprints pose a threat to us in the Pacific and to all humanity.

The vulnerable nations expect you to genuinely work towards the objectives you agreed to in the Paris Agreement - to keep global temperatures well below 2 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level and pursue efforts to limit warming to 1.5 degrees.

We expect you to meet the initial climate action commitments you have already made. But we also ask you to go a lot further, because what we have all committed so far is simply not enough to deal effectively with the scale of the crisis the world is facing.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, as COP President, my formal role come November will be to continue to develop the implementation guidelines of the Paris Agreement - the Rulebook - and prepare for more ambitious climate action through the Facilitative Dialogue of 2018. But it has become very clear to me as incoming President that what is considered ambitious now isn't nearly ambitious enough. We must all make a greater effort, and it is simple logic, basic science, that the biggest carbon emitters must make the greatest reductions of all.

The full implementation of the Paris Agreement is a critical first step and every nation must fulfill the Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs they have made. But it has become clear since Paris that the pace of climate change is even faster than was thought at the time and its impacts are far more serious.

So let me leave you with some of the very latest information that has alarmed me and ought to be of grave concern for every global citizen, and especially those of us in the Pacific.

The current NDCs fall well short of what is needed to achieve the objective of the Paris Agreement - again - to keep global temperatures well below 2 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level and pursue efforts to limit warming to 1.5 degrees. In fact, even if all of the commitments are honoured, the global temperature will be on track to be just under three degrees. And this would be a disaster for the whole planet.

It would mean that Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands are doomed, along with a great many other atolls as well. It would intensify the extreme weather events like Cyclone Winston and Cyclone Pam that have caused so much havoc for Pacific nations. And it would make it virtually impossible for our agriculture to be able to continue to feed our people.

The scientists are now telling us that with the disappearance of the summer ice around the North Pole and the eventual melting of the Arctic and Greenland, the global average sea rise would be a terrifying seven metres. Which means this room would be flooded to the ceiling.

Much of Suva, as we know it, would be under water, and so would large parts of every coastal city in the world. And given that 80 per cent of the world's cities are on coastlines, the global economy would be devastated. And along with that, the living standards of people throughout the world.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, on the best scientific advice, that is the nightmare scenario we face. So to anyone who questions my own commitment to making this a priority I say: What would you do? When the survival of your capital city is at stake, much of your own country and the very existence of some of your neighbours.

That is why I am doing what I have to do. That is why Fiji has taken on the COP Presidency. To show leadership and guide the world towards a solution to undoubtedly the greatest challenge humanity has ever faced.

On the best advice, we must by 2020, fundamentally turn the current position around. We must not abandon our Paris target of 1.5 degrees above the pre-industrial age however difficult it may be to reach. We must also achieve net zero emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gasses within a few decades. That means shifting away from fossil fuels altogether and embracing renewable energy. As well as taking carbon out of the atmosphere through such means as planting forests and mangroves.

I must also be very frank with my own people and other Pacific islanders that in some instances for us, it is already too late. We are already one degree above the temperature of the pre-industrial age. And with that, we are already seeing the destruction of some of our reefs through coral bleaching, with all that entails for our food security, our tourism, our entire way of life.

And so Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, there is an urgency about the task ahead that cannot be overstated. I ask you all to use these next two days to continue to put the Pacific on a leadership footing as we alert the world to the challenges we face. Help make the Pacific story one of investment and innovation, not one of destruction and despair.

I have said all along that Fiji has taken on the role of incoming President of COP23 on behalf of all Pacific Islanders, as well as the citizens of vulnerable nations everywhere. This is very much a Pacific Presidency, an inclusive process in which you all have a role to play. So I thank you all for honouring us - honouring me - with your attendance. I wish you well in your deliberations and as always, encourage our visitors to enjoy your interaction with our people, our environment, and our world famous Fijian hospitality.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.