



Statement on the Presentation of the Voluntary National Review

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Attorney-General and Minister for Economy**

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Madam/Mister Chair

Excellencies

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Bula vinaka (as we say in Fiji) and a very good afternoon to you all.

Fiji is honoured to present at this year's High-Level Political Forum, as we proudly report our progress on several key Sustainable Development Goals through our first-ever Voluntary National Review, with introductory remarks by myself, a video presentation, and a representative from civil society, with our full, comprehensive VNR will be published online in the next two weeks' time.

Fiji has undertaken many measures and initiatives, big and small, to progress each of the six SDGs that are the focus of this year's review, we recognise that there is a common theme that runs through every decision we make, every partnership we forge, and every dollar we invest. At the very core of everything we do is an unshakable commitment to leaving our communities, our country, and the world, better than we left it. We are resolutely committed to equality and inclusivity for all of our citizens, creating a golden era of opportunity for young Fijian girls and boys to take advantage of.

In 2013, we forever enshrined these values in our Constitution, shedding a long history where Fiji was mired with inequality, preferentialism and exclusion. We've put a special focus on bringing in those previously-marginalised members of society — particularly our women, our young people, and those living with disabilities — ensuring that the Fijian future would be one not of oppression and missed opportunities, but one of empowerment and inclusion.

Striking a delicate balance between sustainable development and economic growth, individual empowerment, social inclusivity and environmental conservation has long been a challenge for nations the world over. That's why the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is such an important framework for nations of the world to strive for, to challenge themselves, and to — above all else — never forget that we are fighting not for our political lives, but for the lives of the citizens we serve, the lives of our children and

grandchildren, and the lives of those generations that come long after we've gone. Indeed, the UN's SDGs aren't about checking boxes; they are about real outcomes for our people and our future.

As you can see in our VNR, Fiji has marked incredible progress in the six key areas that were outlined in this year's self-assessment. We have achieved a near 100 per cent literacy rate, provided free primary and secondary education for the first time in Fijian history, led the world to combat climate change as COP23 president, and built an infrastructure network that has brought even Fijians living in the most rural and remote maritime regions into the fold of development. We've cultivated a culture of upward mobility with grant schemes for budding entrepreneurs, including a Young Entrepreneurship Scheme that is turning the energy and ideas of our young people into flourishing businesses. We've grown the Fijian economy for an unprecedented ten straight years, and strengthened our independent institutions, reduced unemployment to record lows and streamlined business processes, embarked on a national digitilisation programme, and — perhaps most importantly — found innovative, blended financing solutions to fund all of this progress in a sustainable and responsible way.

Indeed, over the past decade, Fiji has proven to be a case study in striking that balance of economic growth and sustainability. We are proud of what we have accomplished to make Fiji a more equitable, inclusive, and

prosperous nation than ever before, but we still have a long way to go, and to get there, we cannot go at it alone.

That's why, as we're here at the United Nations Headquarters in New York — the bastion for peace and progress through multilateralism — I want to stress one SDG in particular: Partnerships for the Goals.

Because to continue our progress, and to achieve each of the 17 SDGs, we need to look not only across borders, but across oceans, and across hemispheres, to learn from each other. And sometimes, we just need to look across the street; breaking down silos not only among different countries, but within our own, between civil society organisations, academic institutions, and government agencies to help share knowledge and work toward our common goals, will be what moves us forward.

In Fiji, our partnerships, whether local, regional or international, are helping elevate our economy and our society to the next level. Because while we have built a strong foundation — both with infrastructure and legislation — we can't tap into our full potential without building on that foundation. The classrooms we've built and the education we've provided cannot shape our children's future without countries or development partners like Australia and New Zealand to help shape our curriculum. The roads we've constructed cannot bring access to communities and uplift lives without modern urban planning expertise from partners like Singapore. And without partnerships

from around the world to strike blended financing solutions and offer knowledge sharing, our ambitions will go unfulfilled.

That's why meetings of the minds like this one are so important, and why we must never lose sight of the true might of multilateralism. Because, as our VNR has shown, Fiji is truly punching above our weight on the global stage — empowering our people by tapping into the power of partnerships, big and small.

Ladies and gentlemen, Fiji is best known within the United Nations for our passionate activism to combat climate change. Our global leadership on this issue is driven by the fact that, as UN Secretary General António Guterres aptly put it when he visited Fiji in May — climate change is the battle of our lives, and it's a battle that we are currently losing. As a small island nation that has been ravaged by the effects of strengthening storms and rising seas, each and every one of our SDGs — all of our progress, at every level — is held hostage to the climate crisis that we face today. If we are to meet the goals outlined by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, every decision we make must be climate-minded. For without a habitable planet for our children to inherit, all of our work to achieve our SDGs — all of the resources we invest, the time we spend, and the goals we set — will be for naught. But by working together, and finding common ground for the future of our own nations and the world, we will win this battle of our lives, and leave a legacy we can be proud of.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.