



## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

### FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NORTH AMERICA AND THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

#### Sixteenth Session

#### Nadi, Fiji

30 January - 3 February 2023

#### Opening Remarks

#### **Hon. Manoa Kamikamica, The Deputy Prime Minister And Minister For Trade, Co-Operatives, Smes And Communications**

Your Excellencies and Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Ni sa Bula Vinaka and very good morning to you all.

On behalf of the Honourable Prime Minister and the Fiji Government, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to Fiji for the 16th Session of the Codex Committee for North America and South-West Pacific (CCNASWP).

I hope you get an opportunity to experience our warm hospitality and the rich and diverse culture of Fiji.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Codex Committee for North America and South-West Pacific was established 34 years ago and remains a high priority for the region to achieve food safety. As a matter of fact, food safety standards, which serve as reference points for international trade policy, are of great and direct significance to everybody. The primary purpose of Codex standards is to protect consumers' health by ensuring the safety and nutritional quality of food products traded worldwide. In doing so it prevents the spread of disease between countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Food-related diseases can have serious consequences for both human and animal health. They can also have a significant economic impact, as outbreaks of disease can lead to trade bans, loss of revenue and damage to a country's reputation.

It has been found that an estimated 600 million – almost 1 in 10 people in the world – fall ill after eating contaminated food and 420,000 die every year. Children under 5 years of age carry 40% of the foodborne disease burden, with 125,000 deaths every year. Furthermore, USD110 billion is lost each year in productivity and medical expenses resulting from unsafe food in low- and middle-income countries.

Today's rapid changes in trade, travel and commerce call for an international standard-setting system that is able to respond more quickly to new situations.

Since the trade, nutrition and food safety elements are so closely connected, closer collaboration between different sectors and interactions between the Codex and other global players will be essential.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The importance of our work for the region is evidently large. As we gather here today to mark the 16th Session of the CCNASWP, it is important to reflect on our trajectory, consider how the Committee can address challenges, and engage stakeholders for their valuable inputs on food safety issues.

In addition, it is crucial that we remain aware of the latest developments in the field of animal welfare and food safety. This will enable us to anticipate and respond to any changes that may affect our region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Pacific region has made significant progress in implementing CODEX guidelines. One example of this progress is the establishment of a regional CODEX committee, which serves as a platform for sharing

knowledge and best practices among countries in the Pacific region. This committee also works closely with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) to ensure that CODEX guidelines are being properly implemented and to address any challenges that may arise.

The Pacific region has also taken steps to address trade issues in relation to kava, by implementing CODEX guidelines for the international trade of Kava. Kava is a traditional beverage and a valuable export crop for many Pacific Island countries.

Fiji has also adopted the "Fiji Kava Standard" based on CODEX to ensure the welfare of Kava plants during transport and prevent the spread of disease.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Codex work in the region would not have progressed without the support and collaboration of our regional members and organizations experts such as the UN WHO (World Health Organization) and UN FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization).

Therefore, I would like to acknowledge all the experts and members of the region for their tireless efforts in laying the foundations for ensuring food safety globally.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would also like to encourage all of you to share your experiences and best practices with one another in order to improve our overall understanding of the issues at hand.

I am confident that by working together and sharing our knowledge and expertise, we will be able to make a real difference in food safety standards, and achieve more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable food systems.

On that note, it is my pleasure to declare this meeting open. I look forward to a successful meeting.

I hope that your stay in Fiji will be both productive and enjoyable.

Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank you.

### **Mr Vatimi T. T. K Rayalu, Hon Minister for Agriculture and Waterways**

Excellences

Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji and Honourable Minister for Trade and Tourism – Mr Manoa Kamikamica

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Bula Vinaka! It is indeed with great pleasure that I warmly welcome all of you delegates to the 16th Session of the Codex Committee for North America and South-West Pacific (CCNASWP), here in Nadi Fiji.

For those of you who have travelled afar to get here, welcome to the beautiful island of Fiji. I would like to welcome our QUAD member countries-Canada, USA, Australia and NZ and for the benefit of those who are travelling for the first time to the pacific islands, we welcome you to our friendly side of the world. I hope that your stay here will be a memorable one!

Ladies and Gentlemen, These past 2 years have been very challenging especially when the entire global population had recently suffered a health pandemic crisis – COVID 19 caused by an infectious disease, which we have not seen in our lifetime. The pandemic has presented the world and our region with an enormous challenge both socially and economically. These challenges form part of the discussions that experts will try and share with us this week. So, we are here among the best experts whose duties are to develop international food standards.

As you are aware, CODEX is about safe, good food for everyone – everywhere realised through maintaining and adhering to expected international food standards, guidelines and codes of practice that, contribute to the safety, quality and fairness of international food trade. Consumers can trust the safety and quality of the food products they buy and importers will know that food ordered is in accordance with their specifications.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Fijian Government in collaboration with UN FAO and WHO have organised this one-week meeting on a hybrid platform to allow participants from the region and across the globe greater access in to this meeting. This meeting could not be held earlier as scheduled due to the COVID 19 pandemic and now with the border restrictions lifted we are finally able to meet in person to pick up from where we had

left off more than two years ago, particularly in terms of food standards.

The Government and everyone present here have the responsibility of ensuring that all food is safe for everyone. However, I am here today to say that food safety is of paramount importance and everyone who is present here has a role to play in that food chain by placing all food chain processes under a microscopic lenses to ensure that all forms of food are indeed of acceptable quality.

Public concerns about food safety issues often place Codex at the centre of global debates. Veterinary drugs, pesticides, food additives and contaminants are some of the issues that will be discussed in Codex meetings. Codex standards are based on science provided by independent international risk assessment bodies or ad-hoc consultations organized by FAO and WHO.

Food Safety is still a present real challenge in Fiji. Local municipal authorities are ensuring that hotels and restaurants are all HACCP Food safety compliant. Kava for instance, is a commodity that is still considered an important crop for Fiji and the Pacific Islands countries. However, Fiji cultivates kava as their source of livelihood and there are islands and provinces in the Pacific where kava is the principal source of income. Adopting the Kava Regional Standard will improve Kava trade worldwide and would become the first NASWP regional standards.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we should take note of the importance of Codex standards and the role of the FAO/WHO Regional Coordinating Committees (RCCs) and their Members had to play in relation to food standards and food controls at both regional and global level.

Codex standards also serve in many cases as a basis for national legislation. It is therefore important that we as the authority responsible, support our food industries and consumers and delegate taskings through the development of guidelines, and provision of timely information that could guarantee food safety.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fiji is always ready to assist the Secretariat and other members to support fulfilment of the Codex transparency obligations. The occurrence of food-borne illnesses and contaminants are key challenges in the Pacific islands and I thank the Codex Alimentarius Commission for developing relevant standards, which are important for safeguarding public health and improving trade, in a fair, neutral and transparent manner.

I urge members, especially the Pacific island Countries members to increase your participation on the Codex work and to increase the rate of participation in Codex Electronic Working Groups (EWGs). This would improve our contribution in Codex standards formulation. I also urged, eligible Member countries of the region to submit strong individual or group applications for the current round of support from the Codex Trust Fund,

Ladies and Gentlemen, On behalf of the Fiji Government, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of Vanuatu and the people of Vanuatu for their past years coordination role, and their warm and generous hospitality in the last 15<sup>th</sup> Session of Codex Committee for North America and South-West Pacific and we, as members of the CCNASWP look forward to your continuous support in pushing our Regional Codex Agenda.

On that note, I would like to thank the delegations for attending this very important meeting and I hope that the 16<sup>th</sup> Session will be a fruitful and productive meeting for all Regional members on the regular work of the CODEX.

Thank you, Malo 'Aupito,

fa'afetai,

Tagio tumas

“Meitaki” (May-tah-key)

Vinaka Vakalevu and Dhaanvayaad.

### **Mr Steve Wearne, CAC Chairperson**

Your excellencies deputy prime minister and minister of agriculture, distinguished guests, representatives of FAO and WHO, Mister Chairperson, Codex and committee secretariat colleagues, delegates and friends – good morning and good afternoon to you all.

It is my great pleasure and honour to address you at the opening of the 16th session of the FAO/WHO Co-ordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific. Bula and warmest wishes to you all from me and from vice-chairpersons Raj Rajasekar, also here in Fiji for this meeting, Allan Azegele, and Diego Varela.

I recognise and acknowledge that, formally, this is an FAO/WHO joint meeting. Nevertheless regional co-ordinating committees are important events in the Codex calendar as they allow members of a region to meet, discuss, plan and act together. This meeting is particularly important as the first formal meeting of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of Codex – further reason for us to reflect on our successes and achievements to date, but also to plan for our future.

I remember fondly my participation in regional co-ordinating committee meetings in the 2019 round. Unfortunately, due to scheduling, I was unable to attend CCNASWP15. I'm putting that right this week.

I'm often asked what my priorities are for the remainder of my term as chairperson of the commission. I have two. Both are relevant to our work here this week.

The first is delivering impact – not only in advocating for implementation of Codex standards and related texts, but also in thinking when we prioritise and develop new work of where we can best focus our efforts to deliver impact. I'm looking forward to understanding whether your shared priorities include further work to develop regional standards. I know from my discussions with the Chief Executive of FSANZ and the New Zealand Food Safety Minister last week that there are both challenges and opportunities in setting standards for indigenous foods.

The second is ensuring every voice is heard. I know there is a long history of mutual support across this region for the development of capacity to engage with Codex, which I acknowledge and applaud. I'm looking forward to also discussing with you how we might drive forward the continued development of national food control systems across the region, with the benefits for consumer health protection and for trade that would result.

There is much to discuss, and I do not want to take up more of your valuable time. But before I close, Mister Chairperson, I want to acknowledge the important work that you do as Regional Coordinator with your team here in Fiji, and the work done by your predecessors in this role, from Samoa, Tonga, Papua New Guinea and most recently Vanuatu. The Regional Coordinator, nominated and appointed by Members of your region, is at the heart of CCNASWP. You are responsible for chairing the committee, leading engagement and outreach within the region and ensuring the views of members of the region are brought to the table in the Codex Executive Committee. You have my complete support in this role.

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.

**Dr. Joseph Nyeham, Nutrition and Food Systems Officer, Sub-regional office for the Pacific islands, FAO**

Hon Manoa Kamikamica, Deputy Prime Minister

Hon Vatimi Rayalu, Minister for Agriculture and Water Ways

Hon Tomasi Tunabuna, Assistant minister for Agriculture and water ways

Turaga na Tui Nadi, Ratu Vuniyani Navuiuci, High Chief

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

All protocols observed

I have the esteemed honor to provide opening remarks for the official opening of the Codex Alimentarius 16<sup>th</sup> session of the Coordinating Committee for North America and South West Pacific held here on the beautiful Island of Dinarau, Nadi, Fiji.

And I am honestly privileged to do this on behalf of Ms Xiangjun Yao, the FAO Subregional Coordinator for the Pacific Islands, who would have loved to be here, but couldn't due to other commitments.

I would like to begin by thanking the Government of Fiji for its relentless leadership to offer us their warm hospitality not only over this event, but also for several other international symposiums, fora, conferences, etc... that allow the United Nations and other development partners to convene various stakeholders for critical discussions that advance our shared development agendas in the Pacific Region.

The Codex Alimentarius and its associated dialogues like this gathering are an important platform for facilitating the creation of international and national standards for food safety.

And FAO is happy to partner with WHO in making this excellent platform a success for the economies, health and safety of the world.

Food safety is important in the Pacific just as it is for the rest of the world. Pacific Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) have the unenviable identity of living with the existential threats of climate change and diet

related diseases. And this is now compounded by the advent of COVID-19 and the disruption of global supply chain induced by the war in Ukraine.

Despite these challenges, Pacific SIDS are rapidly pursuing varied national ambitions to get a share of the global food market as their economies grow gradually.

They also want the local agrifood systems to thrive, for example, by offering delicious, safe and healthy meals to tourists.

Moreover, they want their local populations to consume food that is safe and healthy.

But for this to happen, they need to ensure a persistent commitment to food safety. These countries are aware, and this is why they are here.

FAO stands ready to continue its support to Pacific SIDS on this path for ensuring food safety for all.

Over the years, we collaborated with Pacific SIDS over various food safety initiatives, for example:

- On ISO accreditation for the Scientific Research Organization of Samoa, National Public Health Laboratory in Solomon Islands.
- Technical support to monitor food safety and quality through capacity development of national food development/ diagnostic laboratory of Vanuatu
- Transferring food products from the Koronivia Research Center to communities in Fiji
- Working with Institute of Applied Sciences of the University of the South Pacific on a feasibility study to update the Pacific Food Composition Tables
- Technical Capacity Building for Codex Standards and Risk Based Food Inspection in Kiribati
- Strengthening Samoa's National Codex Programme
- Training street food vendors in Nauru

We are also collaborating with WHO in helping Pacific SIDS gain access to the Codex Trust Fund, one example, is the delegation from Samoa. They are able to be here, not only for this event, but to also engage their peers from Tonga, Vanuatu, etc... over knowledge sharing as a result of this assistance.

This is to say that the Codex Trust Fund is an important tool.

Ladies and gentlemen Many years ago, when I was a civil servant within the Government of Canada, my Deputy Minister always said "the most important thing that we take away from conferences are not from the speeches, presentation, reports, etc..., they come from the new relationships and friendships that we build".

So I conclude my remarks by inviting you to not be too serious; don't stress yourselves.

Please enjoy your deliberations and build beautiful relationships and friendships.

Thank you.

## **Dr Mark Jacobs, Director of Pacific Technical Support / WHO Representative to the South Pacific**

### INTRODUCTION

Prime Minister the Right Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka, the Honourable Vatimi Rayalu, Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, the Honorable Dr Atonio Lalabalavu, Minister of Health, Dr Yao Xiangjun, FAO Sub-regional Representative, distinguished guests and colleagues.

Ni sa bula Vinaka.

### FOOD SAFETY AND FOODBORNE DISEASES IMPACTS

1. Safe food is essential for health and well-being. It is a basic human right to have access to safe, nutritious and healthy food, and it is fundamental to ensuring that individuals, families and communities can thrive, here in Fiji and around the world.
2. From a public health perspective, an estimated 600 million people– almost one in 10 people in the world – fall ill after eating unsafe food every year, resulting enormous ill-health and 420 000 premature deaths.
3. Our own Western Pacific Region experienced about 21% of all such illness globally, with 125 million cases of foodborne diseases and 50 000 deaths annually. Tragically, 7000 of these deaths were in children under 5 years.

4. Huge as these health impacts are, the impact goes beyond health. From an economic perspective, it is estimated that US\$ 110 billion is lost globally each year in productivity and medical expenses resulting from unsafe food in low- and middle-income countries.
5. Unsafe food also has a negative impact on the international food trade, a topic of major importance for Pacific Island countries. Food safety incidents can undermine current and future access to markets, and result in additional compliance costs for exporters, and as a result have significant economic impacts.
6. And of course we cannot forget the close links between climate change and food safety risks, meaning that without effective climate action these risks and impacts will only increase.

#### WHO GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ACTIONS

7. Sixty years on from the birth of CODEX Alimentarius, WHO continues its commitment to working with countries and partners to reduce the burden of foodborne diseases.
8. In November 2022, WHO launched the new Global Strategy for Food Safety to guide and support Member States in their efforts to prioritize, plan, implement, monitor and regularly evaluate actions to reduce the burden of food-borne diseases for their people.
9. This global strategy built on the Regional Framework for Action on Food Safety in the Western Pacific, endorsed in 2017.
10. WHO is also working to support ministries of health across the Pacific as they seek to encourage people to consume healthier food. Noncommunicable diseases – which we know are largely driven by lifestyle factors such as unhealthy eating – are the number one cause of preventable deaths in the Pacific, responsible for 75% of mortality. The work that will be discussed over the coming days is therefore part of a broader effort to make healthier and safer foods more affordable, accessible and available.

#### CLOSING

11. As we look more specifically at food safety, it is important to emphasise that this is a shared challenge and a shared responsibility among multiple sectors and stakeholders, and effective action requires effective multisectoral collaboration.
12. This is why we are delighted that, under the FAO/WHO CODEX Trust Fund, additional support is available to help eligible countries to engage multisectoral partners in joint projects designed to improve food safety. I understand there will be sessions later in the programme where you will discuss how to access this support.
13. Because concerted efforts on food safety will help countries mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and boost their resilience in the long term by facilitating and accelerating food and agricultural trade, helping to prevent the next zoonotic pandemic, and transforming food systems.
14. We must also recognize connections between the health of people, animals, plants, the environment, and the economy, in order to better prepare for the future. Adopting a holistic One Health approach to food safety can help deliver better food control systems.
15. Food safety is everyone's business and it goes beyond health. Guaranteeing food safety for all is a shared responsibility, which involves the participation of many actors from different sectors, including consumers. It is great to see the diversity of sectors involved in this event and WHO is committed to supporting countries in these efforts.
16. WHO looks forward to the meeting ahead, and to working with all of you into the future on this fundamental health and economic issue. I wish you all the best for a fruitful discussion over the coming days.