



HIS EXCELLENCY
MAJOR-GENERAL (Ret'd) JIOJI KONUSI KONROTE
CF, OF(Mil), MC, SBSt.J, MSD, OMRI, NOC
President of the Republic of Fiji

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT THE GLOBAL SYMPOSIUM ON
SOIL ORGANIC CARBON**

Red Room, FAO HQ
Rome

Tuesday, 21st March 2017
10.00AM

- **The Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Mr. Jose Graziano Da Silva**
- **Mr. Kamernu Vella, European Union Commissioner for Environment**
- **Ms. Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**
- **Mr. Abdalah Mokssit, Secretary of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change,**
- **Mr. Petteri Salas, Secretary General World Meteorological Organization (tbc)**
- **Mr. Edward Norton, United Nations Goodwill Ambassador for Biodiversity (tbc)**
- **Ms. Patricia Espinosa, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC] Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**
- **Permanent Representatives and Heads of Missions to the Food and Agriculture Organisation**
- **Distinguished Guests**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Buongiorno (buon-jor-no)- Italian;
Buenos Dias - Spanish;
Guten Morgen (Goo ten Mogen) German;
Good Morning (European-Common);
Sawubona (Zulu) South African
Molweni (Ihosa) South African
Namaste;
Asalaam Alaykum;
Ni Hao; and
Warmest Pacific greetings to you all.

1. I am honoured to be representing the Government of Fiji, incoming ***President of the 23rd Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP23)***, to open this ***Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon (GSOC17)***.

I am delighted to see the number of participants from all across the world and in particular, other ***Small Island Developing States***, which reinforces the significant role of soils and soil organic carbon to our collective efforts to address ***soil conservation, food security, sustainable development and climate change.***

2. We recognise that Climate Change affects us all. As My Government prepares to lead in its role as COP President, we therefore act on behalf of all countries to ***maintain the momentum of the 2015 Paris Agreement.*** We are however acutely aware of the challenges faced by not only Fijians or Pacific Islanders but by those of other Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) and low-lying countries.

3. Fiji, like other SIDS, is ***particularly vulnerable*** to the ***impacts of climate change and natural disasters.***

A little over a year ago, my country was hit with the most powerful tropical cyclone to make landfall in the southern hemisphere. Today, we are still recovering from the impacts of ***Tropical Cyclone Winston*** on our natural resources, and of course, on our soils.

4. Our soils provide an important range of ***ecosystem services and functions that are key for life on earth.*** Indeed, they are ***essential for supporting food and fibre production, for regulating climate, nutrient cycles, to sequester carbon, filtering and storing water*** and for ***maintaining soil biodiversity.***

5. The co-benefits arising from ***effective*** and ***sustainable management of soil resources*** are key to ***climate change*** and ***food security priorities*** and, as such, cross-cutting for the ***United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*** [UNFCCC], ***United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*** [UNCCD] and ***Convention on Biological Diversity*** [CBD].
6. ***Soils*** are a ***major carbon reservoir*** containing more carbon than the atmosphere and terrestrial vegetation combined. Globally, ***Soil Organic stocks*** are estimated at an ***average of 1,417 Petagrams*** in the first meter of soil and ***2,500 Petagrams*** in the second meter, although their distribution is spatially and temporally variable.

7. **Carbon maintenance** and **sequestration** in soils **remains essential** to **enhance climate** change resilience by offsetting the amount of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere and thereby increasing ecosystem resilience to extreme climatic events.
8. Maintaining and increasing soil organic carbon stocks is critical not only to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and remove CO₂ from the atmosphere, but **essential to improve soil health and fertility and to increase its water holding capacity.**
9. The negative impact on our environment and life as we know it would be colossal if this carbon is released or emitted to the atmosphere in the form of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases.

10. The Paris Agreement, agreed to in December 2015 and which unprecedentedly entered into force last year has committed all Parties to the goal of keeping ***temperature rise to well below 2 degrees and striving towards 1.5 degrees. If we fail to maintain our soils as a carbon reservoir,*** I am afraid that these discussions and negotiations would have been in vain.

11. This notion is supported by the ***Sustainable Development Goals*** and climate change discussions under the Paris agreement and the recent ***Marrakesh COP,*** which imply that ***sustainable soil management should become the worldwide norm*** to not only use soils optimally, but also to preserve and protect them at all times.

12. Unlocking the potential to sequester ***Soil Organic Carbon*** as a function of local soil and climate conditions and, in order to support food production, store and supply more clean water, maintain biodiversity and increase environmental resilience to a changing climate a number of things will be required. First of all, ***sustainable soil management practices are imperative.*** This will need to be supported by ***policies, actions*** and ***most importantly, by investment.*** We will also need to work together as a global community to increase the proportion of finance for climate adaptation, resilience building and in turn, to support effective soil management.

13. As President of COP23, my Government will support efforts to raise the profile of soils and soil organic carbon, so that they are included in the regular discussions of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC] and regarded as a regular element to be reported by countries and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC]. We cannot afford to neglect a resource that could become our serious and viable ally against climate change.

14. Further **research** and **especially research collaboration** is needed to maximize co-benefits of **climate change mitigation** and adaptation/resilience, land degradation neutrality, and biodiversity conservation.

15. The Government of Fiji highly appreciates and strongly supports the **FAO** and the **Global Soil Partnership** for its efforts to increase sustainable soil management to increase soil health globally, not only for climate change adaptation and mitigation, but also for **increased food production.**

16. The **Voluntary Guidelines** for Sustainable Soil Management should be the vehicle to foster policies, action and investment at the national level. At the same time, donors should invest in concrete activities necessary for the achievement of these important goals.

17. We appreciate the Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO] - Small Islands Developing States [SIDS] action programme focus with its three priority areas of **creating an enabling environment for food**

security and ***nutrition***; **sustainable, resilient and nutrition sensitive food systems**; and **empowered people and communities for food security and nutrition**.

18. Through the ***Global Soil Partnership*** and its ***Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils***, FAO has direct interaction with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], Intergovernmental Science – Policy Platform on Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services [IPBES] and Science –Policy Interface [SPI] which strengthens its leadership role in driving the harnessing of co-benefits arising from sustainable soil management.

19. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the cause for our soils and the justification for their protection should be high on the international agenda. To see these efforts

through, this calls for collaborative and coordinated effort to maintain and protect carbon-rich soils and foster higher carbon sequestration as an overarching objective for all member countries.

20. Let's join together to make the ***Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon*** [GSOC17] a point of convergence to make an impact in the fight against climate change.

21. Through the discussions and deliberations at this symposium, it is my hope that ***together we will develop reliable information, informed*** by strong science and research which is focused towards development for all countries and especially Small Islands Developing States [SIDS] and low lying states.

Let's put back carbon where it belongs – in the soil!

Grazie (gra-zee)- *Italian;*

Gracias (gra si az) *Spanish;*

Danke (dank eh) *German;*

Bahoot Dhanyavaad;

Sukria;

Xie Xie; and

Thank you