



HON. INIA B. SERUIRATU

**MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, RURAL & MARITIME DEVELOPMENT,
NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND METEOROLOGICAL SERVICES**

**Opening Statement - Senior Officers Meeting
34th Session of the FAO Asia Pacific Regional Conference
Sofitel, Nadi, 9th - 13th April 2018**

**Excellency the Assistant Director General of the Food & Agriculture
Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Asia Pacific Region – Dr
Kundhavi Kadiresan**

Excellencies and Plenipotentiary Delegates

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Bula Vinaka, Namaste and a very good morning to you all.
2. On behalf of the Government of Fiji and the Fijian people, I wish to convey our greetings to you all. As your host for this 34th Session of the FAO Asia Pacific Regional Conference, I am honoured to deliver an opening address for this Senior Official Meeting here in Nadi, this morning.

4. Let me express my sincere thanks to the Organizing Committee for inviting me to officiate this Senior Officials Meeting for the Asia and the Pacific (FOA APCR). To all distinguished delegates from the 46 countries of the Asia Pacific, Bula Vinaka, Namaste and Welcome to Fiji. Your presence here in Denarau, Nadi, symbolizes your commitment to the success of this Conference.
3. This is the first FAO APCR forum to be hosted by Fiji. This is also the first time in more than two decades that a country in the Pacific has hosted the APCR. The last APCR held in the Pacific was the 23rd APCR, which was hosted by Samoa in 1996. As your host together with FAO for the 34th Session, we are looking forward for a successful and enjoyable meeting throughout the week.
5. Fiji very much values its membership to FAO. Therefore, I want to begin by expressing our sincere appreciation for the support FAO and other member countries has given us over the years and especially in hosting this auspicious event. So we are delighted to be here and to participate in this important event to hear, learn and share our experiences with one another.
6. I also wish to express Fiji's gratitude to the Assistant Director General of FAO for the Asia Pacific Region, Dr. Kundhavi Kadiresan for your high quality value for money services to the Asia Pacific region. Fiji together with our Pacific neighbours and Asia has benefited significantly from your guidance and leadership and we are looking forward for the continuous support in the next biennium.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is the backbone of many economies and plays a pivotal role in the development, growth and stability of the Asia and Pacific region. More than 50 percent of our rural communities rely on these primary resources for their employment, income and livelihoods. Food is a basic necessity of life, while agriculture is its main source. These two sectors are very crucial and need to be harmonized. This is especially true when the world population is projected to increase from 7.4 billion currently, to more than 9 billion in 2050. The increase in population, coupled with changes in Lifestyles, diet and eating patterns will lead to increase in demand for safe and nutritious food.

9. The global challenges, therefore, are to feed the growing population, and at the same time, to sustain a nation's food security. It has a direct impact on millions of undernourished people who never get enough food to eat, and fulfil their basic dietary requirements. The majority of this group, estimated at 500 million out of 800 million live in the Asia Pacific region.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. To this end, I am happy to note that the subject of food security is the main agenda of this conference. Undoubtedly, food security is of high importance to any country. When a country collapses because of natural disasters, war or other calamities, and food becomes unavailable, our national security is compromised. Our presence here

at Denarau this week shows our commitment to ensuring the maintenance and strengthening of national as well as regional food security and stability.

11. Apart from susceptible to extreme climate events, food production has encountered a new challenge where, food is now also a source for renewable energy. This situation makes the agriculture sector a very prominent industry contributing to not only basic energy requirement for the people, but also to the energy sector at large. In this regard, I wish to draw your attention again to the fact that, one third of all food produced worldwide is wasted yearly. Therefore, I call upon all the member states to support the initiative by FAO to reduce food wastage, and help to minimize the carbon footprint due to excessive food production.
12. The inter-linkages of the food and agriculture sector and their pertinent issues, make FAO still vital and relevant after more than 71 years of its existence. FAO has become a centre of reference and avenue of actions to deal with these cross cutting issues. In this regard, I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Assistant Director General for Asia Pacific Region and the FAO team for their commendable and tireless efforts to reduce poverty and ensuring food security.
13. However, there is still a lot more to be done. It is estimated that 85 percent of 500 million small farmers are in our region. These unsung heroes are the ones putting food on our table. Ironically, these small

farmers are still unable to build sufficient resilience in their livelihoods and are facing various hurdles to make their ends meet.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. The Asia and Pacific region, despite impressive economic growth in recent decades, is home to 490 million people still suffering from chronic hunger, accounting for 62 percent of undernourished people in the world. Stunting of children is still a challenge, micronutrient deficiencies are still a major problem in many countries, while the trend in childhood obesity is increasing.
15. As the challenges of hunger, malnutrition and poverty are intertwined and the poor and hungry are concentrated in the agriculture and rural sectors in most of the Asia Pacific region, an increase in investments in agriculture and rural development is much needed to increase income, employment and food and nutrition security.
16. In the context of Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2), it is feasible to eliminate hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030. To achieve Zero Hunger, it is necessary that every country in the region, together with FAO, the International Development Fund for Agriculture (IFAD), the World Food Programme, and other regional institutions come together to transform our rural economy and to empower small-scale and family farmers as critical agents of change.
17. In 2014, Fiji was among 13 countries which received recognition from FAO for outstanding progress in fighting hunger, ahead of the end of

2015 MDG deadline. However, we did not stop there. The Fijian Government continues to address the issue of poverty through its National Development Plan, Green Growth Framework, Agriculture Policy 2020, to name just a few.

18. However, the pursuit of augmenting food and agriculture is unfortunately not getting easier. The world is now facing other challenges which all require urgent response measures.
19. Furthermore, increased frequency of droughts and floods will affect crop production especially in subsistence sectors. Agriculture will, therefore, have to cope with increased climate variability and more extreme weather events and at the same time, meet the increasing demand for food, feed, fibre and fuel, all of which, has the potential to irreversibly damage the natural resources on which agriculture depends on. It sure sounds very challenging.
20. Agriculture is, thus, at a crossroad. It has to find ways to feed the world while being environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. I believe that this notion is the push behind FAO's initiative to achieve the newly launched sustainable development goals or SDGs, which offer a vision of a fairer, more prosperous, peaceful and sustainable world which is inclusive and does not leave anyone behind.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- 21 I would like to highlight the fact that the Small Islands Development States (SIDS) including all Pacific Islands nations, are faced with a

unique sustainable development challenge. While many nations in the Pacific Community rely on food imports, and struggle with malnutrition, undernourishment and obesity, these issues are further exacerbated by climate change, which affects local food production.

22. The SAMOA (SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action) Pathway, the outcome document of past conferences, emphasized the need for national leadership and international cooperation in order to overcome this unique sustainable development challenges faced by SIDS.
23. I wish to acknowledge FAO at this juncture for they have worked closely with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the United Nations Office for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS) to respond to the invitation to facilitate the development of a food security and nutrition action programme for SIDS. This has resulted in the Global Action Programme on Food Security and Nutrition (GAP) for the SIDS which was officially launched on the side lines of the 40th Session of the FAO Conference, in Rome, in July 2017.
24. Fiji together with other SIDS, is looking forward to GAP mutually reinforcing an enabling environment for food security and nutrition. It will enable us to establish sustainable, resilient food systems that support healthy diets and nutrition; and it will further empower our people and communities to achieve improved food security and nutrition, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups.

25. To accelerate action on food security and nutrition in the Pacific Small Islands Developing States, we call for a more integrated, multi-stakeholder approach to address the unique food security and nutrition challenges faced by SIDS.
26. This will support our efforts towards attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and bringing the SAMOA pathway and the SDGs together.
27. We will also need support from other development partners to complement the implementation of the next Country Programme Framework which we believe has incorporated the various issues we will be discussing this week. It will need greater coordination, intervention and information sharing at national and regional level.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

28. I have just shared my thoughts with you on the global, and specifically the Asia Pacific scenario for food and agriculture. In line with the SDGs to achieve zero poverty and hunger, I wish to reaffirm three approaches to ensure food security and food sovereignty in this region.
28. The approaches are: (1) Stimulate private sector investment in agriculture; (2) Address climate change issues with sustainable agriculture; and (3) Reduce poverty by utilizing biodiversity. I firmly believe that these three approaches can further spur the region to

better sustainable development, and I hope there will be active discussions on these subjects to the benefit of the member countries.

29. We have big tasks ahead of us. There are pertinent and critical matters to be deliberated to ensure food security and sovereignty in this region. Let us all put together our ideas and efforts to ensure the sustainability of our region and our future. As a famous quote by Colin Powell goes, "A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work."
30. I am optimistic that under the capable hands of FAO and, with commitments from all of you here, we will be able to work together to develop strategies towards more sustainable and efficient agriculture and food production in the future.
31. Again, I wish to thank FAO and its member countries for supporting Fiji in hosting this Senior Officials Meeting. I also want to close with an expression of thanks, on behalf of every Fijian, for the support, the companionship and the solidarity of those of you gathered here today to seek solutions for enhanced food security and sustainable development, by working together and by committing your time and effort.
33. With those few words, I declare this Senior Officials Meeting OPEN.
Vinaka vakalevu and Thank you.

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