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**FIJI'S ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE - HEAD OF DELEGATION**

**Statement on Review of the State of Food and Agriculture – Climate Change, Agriculture  
and Food Security**

**40<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference  
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**The Chairperson of the 40<sup>th</sup> Session of Food & Agriculture Organization of the  
United Nations (FAO) Conference**

**The Director General OF FAO**

**Excellencies, Government Ministers**

**Heads of Delegation**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula Vinaka (Hello) and a very good afternoon to you all.

On behalf of the Government of Fiji and the Fijian people, we wish to convey our greetings to you all and it is a wonderful privilege to be here in Rome for this very important event – the 40<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference.

Fiji very much values its membership to FAO and I want to begin, by expressing our sincere appreciation for the support FAO and other member countries have given us

over the years. Especially the support you are giving Fiji in 2017 as we take on the responsibility as president of COP23. It is critically imperative for all of us that we persuade the world to take urgent action on climate change, to mitigate its impact especially on agriculture and food security. We are therefore delighted to be able to participate in this important event - to share our experiences.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Agriculture is the backbone and plays a pivotal role in the development, growth and stability of the Fiji's economy. Primary production in non-cane Agriculture contributes around 8.1% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and even more when we consider all activities generated by agriculture, such as storage, transportation and manufacturing. The sector employs around 65% of the total workforce. The Fiji Agriculture Census in 2009, recorded a total of 64,000 farmers of which 90% are in the rural areas that relies on agriculture for their employment, income and livelihoods. Therefore, when we fix Agriculture, we are actually addressing the livelihood of the rural and grass root people.

Fiji and other Small Island Developing States are amongst the highest at risk of experiencing the impacts of natural disasters. Climate change is real and whether we come from the small Islands in the Pacific or developed nations, ultimately we cannot escape the impact of climate change. Climate change represents the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security, social development and wellbeing of the world including Fiji.

The world's highest rates of sea-level rise are expected in the Pacific, and even under the most optimistic projections will lead to catastrophic impacts, especially for the region's low lying atoll nations like the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu. Temperatures in the region have been increasing and if emissions remain at current rates, serious

implications will be experienced for agriculture, fisheries, biodiversity, fresh water resources, infrastructure, tourism, health and of course agriculture and food security.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

For Fiji, droughts, floods, storms and other disasters triggered by climate change have risen in frequency and severity in the recent past causing damages to Fiji's agricultural sectors and its development. The 2014 United Nations World Risk Report ranks Fiji as one of the world's 15 most exposed countries to natural hazards.

Tropical cyclone Winston which hit Fiji in 2016 resulted in a total damage of USD 1.2 billion to Fiji's economy with USD 61 million attributed to the agriculture sector alone. Destruction to houses, infrastructure, and loss of vegetation, land erosion, coastal inundation, destruction of coral reefs and sea grass beds, and pollution of water supplies are all effects of these cyclone. Around 44 lives were lost.

In 1997, 1998 and 2015, we experienced one of the worst droughts in the history of Fiji. It caused hundreds of millions of dollars of loss in revenue in the agriculture sector, especially on sugar. The Western sides of Fiji were the worst hit regions, where 90% of the population received food and water rations.

Since 2009 to 2016, Fiji has been experiencing prolong days of heavy rain where flash floods were experienced especially on low lying areas and also on major towns and cities. The floods damaged roads, bridges and other infrastructures. It caused the loss of major crops like taro, cassava, ginger, banana, assorted vegetables, fruits and fruit trees which provides livelihood and food security to Fijians. It caused loss of livestock especially poultry, dairy, beef, pigs and other ruminant livestock. There was loss of lives through landslide and drowning.

In 2012, due to prolonged rain, there was an outbreak of animal diseases like Brucellosis and Bovine Tuberculosis, which affected our livestock industry, especially our dairy industry. The Fijian Government had to import new breeding stocks from Australia and New Zealand to rehabilitate this industry. Again we have to seek assistance from other developing partners like FAO for the eradication and management of these diseases. Over those years, again hundreds of millions of dollars were lost which had an impact on agriculture development and food security.

There are other impacts of climate change I wish to share with you today, like the rising sea levels. Last year, 2016, our government had to relocate three villages as seawater intrusion has washed the shores at an alarming rate. Seawater intrusion has washed out arable land or permanently increased its salinity through storm surges and flash floods which makes land unsuitable for agricultural production.

Landslides were experienced on some of the islands and have resulted in severe damage and destruction to agriculture and infrastructure. In the last few years, we were experiencing an increase in the number of earthquakes and tsunami warnings.

Because of the important role agriculture plays in the creation of national wealth and the population needs for food security, the agricultural sector appears as a highly vulnerable one. The loss of crops, livestock, trees or forests, and also on our ocean resources has long-term consequences on our production, productivity, food security and also the ability to generate income for livelihood. Recurrent disasters in the same geographical area have led to reduced investment due to the perceived risk of asset loss.

Excelsencies, again I wish to thank FAO and its member countries for their support for Fiji in the rehabilitation work after major natural disasters. I also wish to thank FAO for supporting us especially on our presidency of COP23. Excelsencies, while I have

said that, it is only natural given the part of the world I come from, that we want to see climate action in the Pacific. We have a particular interest in agriculture and food security, in our oceans and seas because they are our livelihood. Fiji is looking forward to your continued collaboration especially in the next biennium and beyond.

I want to close with an expression of thanks on behalf of every Fijian for the support, for the companionship and solidarity of those of you gathered here to seek solutions by working together and to commit to our effort to mitigate and to adapt to climate change for food security and sustainable development in agriculture as a whole.

Vinaka vakalevu.

Thank you.