



## MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND IMMIGRATION

### GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

#### STATEMENT TO THE ESCAP

Honourable Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Prime Ministers, Ministers, Ambassadors, delegates ladies and gentlemen.

Kia orana and Good afternoon.

May I take this opportunity to thank the Government and people of the Kingdom of Thailand for the very warm hospitality extended to the Cook Islands delegation on this occasion, and also to commend the Secretariat of ESCAP for the excellent arrangements they have made for the week and for the organisation of this agenda.

Honourable Chair, the Cook Islands will keep its statement brief, as we have important deliberations ahead of us, but would like to take this opportunity to highlight several matters of importance to us.

Firstly, we are pleased to see ESCAP's efforts to engage in a more concrete way in our region – the Pacific region, including working with and supplementing the efforts of our Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) agencies, such as with the Secretariat of Pacific Community (SPC). We think this is a sensible and practical way to deliver services and support to the people of our region.

Second, the Cook Islands are pleased to see that 'Oceans' has now become a separate and distinct Agenda item for the post 2015 Development Agenda, as in being a 'large ocean state', our surrounding oceans and seas are fundamental to our economic development, as well as our social wellbeing. So we are very pleased to see this is now a specific area of focus for the UN and ESCAP.

Thirdly, we are most pleased to see the two resolutions that have come forward from our Pacific region: namely the Resolution on Implementing the Suva Declaration on Improving Maritime Transport and Related Services in the Pacific; and the Resolution on Implementing the outcomes of the first Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, which was jointly sponsored by the Kingdom of Tonga and the Russian Federation. The Cook Islands was both pleased and honoured to co-sponsor both these Resolutions.

With respect to the first Resolution, it is timely that this Resolution has been brought forward by Fiji now, as we note one of the important themes raised in the Ministerial session is "Regional Connectivity for Shared Prosperity" and the very useful Panel Discussions we heard yesterday. Our islands are widely dispersed over the vast Pacific Ocean, and in my country of the Cook Islands, this is a critical challenge for us as we try to provide reliable and sustainable sea transportation between our tiny and disparate populations and

communities. To respond to this challenge, the Cook Islands has undertaken a major upgrade of its port facilities in 2012-13 on the capital island of Rarotonga, in order to handle larger freight and tanker vessels, and embarked on an ambitious programme to upgrade all the harbours of its outer islands. There is no doubt however that this issue remains absolutely critical for the economic development of our region, as well as for maintaining stable and sustainable societies throughout our island nations.

In terms of connectivity and ICT, the Cook Islands also sees this as a vital part of our economic and social development, has formed a partnership with the Communications provider 'O3B', (which is an acronym for the 'other three billion' people who don't have access to broadband internet) in providing satellite based internet access equivalent to broadband speed to its islands. It was the first such country to do so. The Cook Islands has found that low orbit satellite systems provide a viable alternative to fibre optic cable where it is too costly to implement such systems otherwise.

With respect to the second resolution brought forward for our consideration, we are happy and proud to see that one of our fellow Pacific Island countries has taken the initiative in leading the way forward in the vital area of energy, which we can all agree is the fundamental building block that underpins all sustainable economic development, and the effective functioning of our societies in general. We would like to provide our support to the Kingdom of Tonga in its efforts to host the next Energy Forum, and express our hope that the international community and friends around the room do the same to ensure we do not lose valuable momentum in this important area.

With respect to the issue of energy, the Cook Islands, has also embarked on an ambitious goal of generating 50% of its electricity needs from renewable sources, primarily solar, by 2015, and 100% by 2020. To facilitate the shift from diesel generation to renewable generation the Cook Islands is progressively implementing projects to install renewable energy sources throughout its remote Northern Group islands as well as on the main island of Rarotonga.

Lastly, it would be remiss of the Cook Islands not to draw attention to the forthcoming Conference on Small Island Developing States being hosted in our region by Samoa, and to highlight the need for the outcomes of the SAMOA Pathway to be reflected in the work of ESCAP, and in giving effect to them. The Cook Islands acknowledges that the theme of the Conference "The sustainable development of small island developing States through genuine and durable partnerships" provides us – the UN family and our development partners - with the opportunity to build on existing successful partnerships as well as to launch innovative and concrete new ones to advance the sustainable development of small island developing States.

The Cook Islands would like join with Samoa in welcoming the members of the UN Family to our region, and hope the focus on SIDS in such conducive surroundings will result in positive outcomes for all our Pacific island people.

Your Excellency, I thank you for the opportunity to make this statement.

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