REPUBLIC OF VANUATU

UNESCAP 75th COMMISSION SESSION
27 - 31 MAY, 2019 Bangkok, Kingdom of Thailand

"Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality."

COUNTRY STATEMENT

Delivered by Honourable Bob Loughman, Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Tourism, Commerce, Trades and Ni Vanuatu Business

27 May 2019
Chair of the 75th Session of ESCAP
Honourable Ministers and Distinguished delegates;
Executive Secretary of UNESCAP,
Ladies and Gentlemen;

I convey to you all warmest greetings from the Government and the people of the Republic of Vanuatu. In doing so, may I also convey our sincere congratulations to the distinguished Chair on your election as the Chair of the 75th commission session.

At the outset, I wish to express my delegation's gratitude and appreciation to the Government of Thailand and the ESCAP Secretariat for hosting this, the 75th United Nations Economic and Social Commission session for Asia and Pacific, and for being such a warm and sincere host of this event, and for the ongoing support provided by ESCAP.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

In keeping with this year’s theme, I would like to share with you some insights from Vanuatu’s perspective.

Vanuatu consists of 83 islands with a total population of roughly 280,000, of whom almost 80% still live in rural areas.

Vanuatu welcomes the 75th Session of ESCAP’s theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. Like many Small Island Developing States, we have embraced the UN SDGs. Therefore, in 2016 Vanuatu launched our National Sustainable Development Plan, also known as 2030: The People’s Plan. The Plan has three pillars – Society, Environment, and Economic – working towards the National Vision of a ‘Stable, Sustainable, and Prosperous Vanuatu’. As you may have noticed, this national vision is very similar to the theme of this session "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality". Under each pillar we have a number of goals and policy objectives. This includes an alignment with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In Vanuatu we are very proud of The People’s Plan, and the way in which it outlines a long-term vision for the country, in alignment
with the SDGs. I will now briefly highlight some of our work, but please talk to a member of our delegation if you would like to find out more about it.

**Inclusivity and Equality**

- In line with national development priorities and commitment under the NSDP, we are working towards equitable development across the country to ensure better access and people development. The implementation of a Decentralisation Policy brings the government closer to the people by providing citizens with greater control over decision-making process and allowing their direct participation in public service delivery.

- The Department of Women’s Affairs has formulated the key gender policies, having given due consideration to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These include policies on Gender Equality, Disability Inclusivity, Child Protection – including online – and a strategy for justice and community services.

- In a cabinet decision of 2017, the Government endorsed a Gender Responsive Budget. It further endorsed that gender equality and women’s empowerment be mainstreamed in each ministry. Further the National Gender Equality Policy identifies reducing domestic and gender-based violence; enhancing women’s economic empowerment; promoting women’s leadership and equal political participation and building a foundation for gender mainstreaming as its four strategic priorities.

**Education**

- Vanuatu’s National Sector Development Plan mandates that every child, regardless of gender, location, education needs, or circumstances must be able to access the education system. Government has expanded its outreach to ensure access to education through its school grant. The education sector plan development
grant aims to strengthen the knowledge required for the development of more equitable and efficient education sector plan and to build capacity for staff in the Ministry of Education and Training. The analysis will also guide the development of a new Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategy for 2019-2030.

Climate Change

- The National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction 2016 – 2030, provides the framework to ensure that our communities, environment and economy are resilient to the impacts of climate change and disaster. The policy ensures that risks are identified, assessed, reduced and managed. It was formulated following a risk governance assessment to analyze Vanuatu’s climate change and disaster risk governance capacity and needs at both national and local levels.

- We would also like to inform this commission that the United Nations Secretary-General, His Excellency António Guterres recent visit to the Pacific Islands including Vanuatu, is a manifestation in terms of UN commitment to the pacific island states, that we are important allies in the fight against Climate Change. This reassures Small Island Developing States such as Vanuatu, that the UN is committed to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recognizing that the dignity of the individual is fundamental and that the Agenda’s Goals and targets should be met for all nations and people and for all segments of society.

Justice

- The Government’s National Anti-Corruption Strategy is grounded in the Vanuatu 2030: The People’s Plan and the SDGs providing the framework for the Government’s commitment to eliminate corruption. The National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy aims to strengthen the foundation of Vanuatu’s society, increase the
efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector, build trust in public institutions, and help pave the way for sustainable economic development and equal opportunity for all citizens of Vanuatu.

Economy

- The Government is working particularly hard to ensure that the benefits of economic growth reach all parts of Vanuatu. In particular, the Ministries of Trade and Agriculture have recently started to work together to a level of integration never seen in the country before, to try and develop high-value products throughout the rural areas. One project which the Ministry of Trade is leading on is establishing a Special Economic Zone on the island of Santo. This island is incredibly fertile, with an international port. Vanuatu already offers an attractive prospect for investors, with a safe and beautiful country, no income taxes, and a stable macroeconomic climate. The Special Economic Zone will build on this by creating an area with excellent infrastructure and business links, and we hope that it can attract many businesses to our wonderful country.

Honourable Chair, all of this work cannot be done in isolation and can only be achieved by forging partnerships with development partners and most importantly our very own citizens across every sector of society. And these progresses that we have achieved so far goes only to further reflect the combined impact of initiatives led by the Government of Vanuatu, UNESCAP Pacific, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), The Pacific Community (SPC), UN agencies and many other Developing Partners and stakeholders.

On the other hand, we also acknowledge that sustainable development is ongoing and that we cannot afford to be too complacent with our achievements thus far. We recognise that our policies need to be constantly evolving, smart, highly responsive to our circumstances and affordable to our context of our limited financial resources as a small island developing state.
Least Developed Country (LDC)

Vanuatu is set to graduate from LDC status next year. Whilst Vanuatu performs very strongly on the Gross National Income per capita and the human assets index, the analysis shows Vanuatu’s economic vulnerability is still incredibly high. Indeed, the UN ranks Vanuatu as the number one country for risk of natural disasters in the world. We will therefore be seeking to work with donor partners and the international community in order to ensure that our transition is as smooth as possible, particularly with issues such as trade, and diversification of production. At the same time, LDC Graduation is an opportunity to celebrate the hard work of the Ni-Vanuatu over the past 39 years since independence. It shows the progress that has happened, and we are proud of this.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the Vanuatu Government maintains its commitment not only to implement the government policies as stated in The People’s Plan, but to also monitor progress of the NSDP & SDGs and continue to address the issues that hinder development efforts and ensure that “no-one is left behind”.

Thank you for your attention.