

CSO Collective Statement

Bula Vinaka and Hello!

It is indeed an honor to present the collective statement on behalf of the Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism. We are here to deliver and reiterate our demand for development justice. The Pacific is at the forefront of climate change. Of course! You've probably heard that phrase one too many times and think it's become a little cliché, but I'm here to tell you – **NO IT HASN'T!** The many other Pacific islanders and I that are here at the APFSD 2023 are here to tell you that we're here and you can't say Asia-Pacific if there is no Pacific. The Pacific cannot be silent! We will not continue to be missed out or represented by others that don't truly understand the challenges of our subregion.

This year's APFSD theme reiterates the importance of working together to achieve the SDGs. We have seen the inequalities that continue to exist in our communities where the rich get richer and poor get poorer, geopolitics continues to breed corruption increasing missed opportunities for development coupled with exploitation by foreign corporate investors seeking to provide cheap labor for ridiculous long working hours. But hey, what can we do when we come from a subregion that is remote and with limited resources?

The future of the Pacific, as well as other subregions present in the region, in relation to the SDG progress and implementation is at a critical time. The unavailability of data on almost 47% of the indicators of the goals could further dampen the scope of achieving the 2030 Agenda in the second half the century specially factoring in the regressions.

The SDG Summit and Summit of the Future is a response from the UN to address the lapses of the development process in the 2030 Agenda. However, it is unclear how the Summit will address the worsening systemic barriers that affect marginalized regions and sectors such as ours in the Pacific and people with disabilities.

With this, we fight back! We push back against the odds and say **ENOUGH!** In the fight to achieve and promote development justice, we are demanding our governments and the UN to include us and **ensure no one is left behind!** A few days ago, I learnt from a fellow youth at the YOUTH APFSD that when we don't include marginalized groups in key decision-making processes, we put ourselves further behind in development. When all diversities of people are not included, it takes a toll on the development of the community as a whole. It is crucial that we address the barriers and work together to leverage on rights holder engagement from global to community level, and collectively design policies and programmes in consultation with marginalized groups towards accelerating recovery and achievement of the SDGs. We must ensure that marginalized communities are considered as fundamental contributors in the planning, implementation, response, and monitoring.

I encourage us to look at possible means of engaging together that prohibit any form of discrimination, placing particular emphasis on intersectionality and diversity. For persons with disabilities, we must ensure the preconditions to inclusion that can empower us to meaningfully participate and engage in their communities through accessibility, provision of assistive devices, community based inclusive development, social protection, support services and non-discrimination for everyone in the region. This can only be achieved by going beyond the SDG

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Summit and the Summit of the Future and ultimately demanding development justice that addresses the multiple crises the region faces today.

I'd like to end my statement by quote by a close friend of mine, a champion for persons with disabilities in the Pacific, the late Joshco Edward Wakaniyasi, **“Whichever part – know that the role you do and provide has a human face behind it”**.

Here's to continuously working together in solidarity!

Thank you, Chair.