

Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
and Executive Secretary of ESCAP

Opening Remarks (as prepared for delivery)

Fifth Pacific Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals
Thursday, 25 November 2021
(Prepared for 7 minutes)

Excellency Mr. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, and Minister responsible for Climate Change of Fiji,

Excellency Mr. Henry Puna, Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum,

Dear Colleague, Sanaka Samarasinha, UN Resident Coordinator,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Participants, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the **Fifth Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and Capacity Building Workshop for Pacific SIDS.**

I wish to express my appreciation to the Government of Fiji for co-hosting the event, along with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Pacific Community (SPC) and partners.

The Pacific small island developing States (Pacific SIDS) are at the crossroad of hope and uncertainties.

The test of solidarity rests on the way the international community can help navigate the Pacific development challenges.

ESCAP analysis shows that the Pacific subregion is not on track to achieve any of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Yet, the SDGs remain our compass to lead us through the recovery from the ongoing socio-economic crisis and the climate emergency.

Excellencies,

To recover better together, we must be bold and ambitious. The principles of inclusivity, resiliency and sustainability should be at the core of the recovery strategy.

Please allow me to put forward four policy priorities and related regional cooperation frameworks as agreed by our member States for your further discussions and actions.

First, let us mobilize all our resources to keep the 1.5 goal alive.

Our Pacific countries are among the smallest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, yet they are among the most highly exposed to the worst of climate change impacts.

I commend the Pacific leaders call at COP26 for a common position to ensure rapid, deep and sustained emission reduction in this decade – specifically a 45 per cent cut by 2030 compared to 2010 levels.

Indeed, the time is now to deliver on the promise of \$100 billion for climate finance, boosting finance for adaptation, strengthening cooperative action on technology development and transfer, and scaling up support for loss and damage as set out in the Glasgow Climate Pact.

I am pleased to highlight that ESCAP is working with member States and partners to step up joint programming in environment and ecosystem, sustainable oceans, disaster risk reduction and resilience in the Pacific region.

Second, we must put health systems resilience and social protection at the center of post-COVID-19 recovery.

By establishing a comprehensive policy package to guarantee universal access to social services, governments are better positioned to protect the well-being of marginalized and vulnerable groups and restart economies.

There are opportunities to strengthen and widen these social policies and institutional architecture, along with existing extensive informal and traditional mechanisms.

ESCAP and regional partners have been assisting Pacific governments to develop shock-responsive, gender-sensitive and inclusive systems, which can be harnessed further under the Asia-Pacific regional action plan.

Third, we need to accelerate climate-smart trade and sustainable energy transition.

Cross-border paperless trade, including climate-smart trade strategies and logistics and transit transport systems, have received urgent attention in the wake of the pandemic-induced border closures and supply-chain disruptions in the Pacific.

The Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific provides an important tool to reap the benefits of digital trade facilitation measures in support of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

In fact, transboundary energy infrastructure and networks are becoming a key instrument for the Pacific SIDS in implementing clean energy solutions while supporting the delivery of SDG 7 roadmaps and the Paris Agreement.

Fourth, we have to leverage climate and disaster risk finance.

Financing sustainable development is one of the critical drivers to addressing climate change, disaster resilience and socio-economic recovery.

The pandemics have severely impacted the real economic activities, while limited fiscal resources and increased debt-distress have further constrained investment flows necessary to move Pacific SIDS out of the crisis.

There are new avenues to mobilize more innovative financial mechanisms, such as thematic bonds, debt-for-climate swaps and blended finance through the Pacific regional cooperation frameworks.

I am delighted to welcome our joint work with the PIFS to scale up regional initiatives on climate finance approaches.

Excellencies,

Regional development partnership is the way forward, and ESCAP stands ready to provide all necessary help through our inter-governmental platform.

I signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the SPC in 2021 and look forward to signing a new MoU with the Director-General of SPREP later today. I have reached an agreement with the Secretary-General of PIFS to prepare and sign a renewed MoU early in 2022.

These agreements focus on the implementation of the priorities of the Pacific.

ESCAP remains committed to the UN country frameworks, the multi-country offices (MCOs), the SAMOA Pathway and related programmatic response and commitments in the Pacific.

I look forward to receiving the outcomes of your discussions, which will be tabled for further discussions at the 9th Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD) to be held from 28 to 31 March 2022.

I count on your continued leadership. I wish everyone a successful Forum.

Thank you very much.