

**Opening Remarks for Hon. Aiyaz Sayed Khaiyum,  
Attorney-General & Minister for Economy, Government of Fiji**

**Pre Recorded Message** for

**Fifth Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and  
Capacity Building Workshop for Pacific SIDS**

***Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Context of  
COVID-19 and the Climate Emergency***

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Amid the wreckage of COVID-19 and the climate emergency, were leaders to sit down today to draft the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030, I think we can expect that the outcome would look quite different to the roadmap that emerged from New York in 2015.

The world has changed in very serious ways these past six years. It is more dangerous. It is less certain. Worse, it has become more unequal.

For SIDS, the crushing impact of the pandemic on top of the devastation from climate change have defied even the most pessimistic projections for our growth and development. While the wealthy world has built a wall around themselves trillions of dollars high, we've seen years of development progress wiped out in months due to COVID-19 — or even in hours due to climate-driven cyclones.

We aren't alone. Global poverty rose last year for the first time since 1998 as more than 120 million people across the world were pushed into extreme poverty. In 2021, more than 235 million people worldwide are expected to be in need of humanitarian assistance and protection — putting them at even greater risk of armed conflict, epidemics, starvation, disasters and other emergencies.

And the situation would be much worse if it not for the courage shown by countless developing country governments. In the interest of public safety and socioeconomic stability through the pandemic and in the aftermath of climate disasters, developing nations have stepped up to fund social protection programmes. Now they're left with shackling debt as a reward for staving off humanitarian catastrophe.

How have we let this happen? How are billions of people on this planet, in this century, moving backwards despite all of the knowledge, technology and solutions at our disposal? We don't have long to find those answers and figure out how we can do much better.

No one doubts the nobility of the SDGs. But with eight short years left to achieve them, it's time we start seriously asking how any of them are possible to meet. And we have to assess their relevance against the backdrop of the pandemic and the specter of the climate crisis, as well as repeated shortcomings in our multilateral system.

For our part, Fiji will do everything within our power — with the resources we do have — to deliver on the 2030 agenda, beginning with a pandemic recovery that is centered on sustainability. Every public investment decision we make moving forward will be informed by sustainability considerations — including impacts on economies, communities and the natural environment. And every dollar spent on development must lead to climate resilience.

For Fiji and other SIDS, adaptation is our overriding priority. Otherwise, any progress we make risks being wiped away by climate disasters. Yet of the insufficient pool of climate finance available to us, only a measly two percent has gone to SIDS, of which only 25% has been earmarked — though not necessarily delivered — for adaptation. With that sliver of a sliver, we have been expected to adapt to a climate we are not responsible for changing. So long as that gap persists, the 2030 Agenda will remain an aspiration.

In assessing how to make the most of the meagre resources available to us, we in Fiji have taken stock of the real drivers of climate vulnerability in the Pacific – and what we really face are systemic development issues.

I'd like to give quick examples of what we are doing to leverage a 'Development Focused' school of thought.

With regard to systems change, enhancing transparency and good governance, our Public Financial Management System needs to do a much better job of tracking climate finance flows.

We are working to engrain climate and environment expenditure tracking into the national budget formulation process, linking this to the revised national Chart of Accounts and digitally tracking domestic climate centric expenditure with the potential to scale up and track SDG related expenditures as well. This is part of Fiji's Public Financial Management Reform Plan and a key component of our recently enacted Climate Change Act.

We are curating a pipeline of scalable projects that simultaneously drive forward multiple SDGs to create truly transformative change. This stands in stark contrast to piecemeal 'tick the box' projects that have limited long term impacts. In particular, we are working on off-grid renewable rural electrification that incorporates access to mobile digital connectivity and access to safe water through desalination and livelihood development all through a single project that addresses SDGs 6, 7, 9 and 13. We are also in the process of launching a blue bond in 2022 that will finance sustainable commercial aquaculture, hybrid electric interisland shipping, and coastal protection using integrated nature-based solutions.

We need to take charge of SDGs at the national level. The Pacific is filled with innovative examples of projects that can be promoted and scaled. The development first approach is bringing financial best practices of the Pacific to the global arena to influence the development of new principles and recommendations to mobilise climate finance. The demonstrative climate leadership of the Pacific has huge potential to make us test-beds for the rapid mobilisation of climate finance with the potential to support broader development.

These approaches must be coupled with robust national systems that actively curate, monitor and track detailed data on SDG progress. Data limitations have continued to plague the Pacific with regard to SDG implementation — a problem that stretches back to the Millennium Development Goals. The UN system needs much more to strengthen national MRV systems for SDGs - I note that UNESCAP is helping Fiji digitize its SDG database. This work needs to be urgently expedited.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The 2030 Agenda isn't just a noble aspiration, it is a global credibility test. Its success or its failure will stand as testament to true commitment of our community of nations. It will determine once and for all whether we are talkers, or doers.

As we engage in deliberations over the next two days, it is crucial that we seek solutions that get all of us moving forwards towards the SDGs, not backwards.

There is much to be done and there is very little time.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.