MINISTER FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION HON. MERSEINI VUNIWAQA

High Level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Midpoint Review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities

Thursday, 30th November, 2017

Country Statement: Forward-looking policies to accelerate the implementation of the Incheon Strategy under Item 9

Chair,

Excellencies,

And Distinguished Delegates.

It is my honor to participate at this high level forum to highlight Fiji’s forward looking policies that would accelerate the implementation of the Incheon Strategy.
As a country, noteworthy changes in recent government led programs, obviously with strengthened collaborations with Civil Society Organizations, so that we can bring positive changes to the lives of Fijians with Disabilities.

The political will and commitment to address the rights based and inclusive based approach is the driver to the acceleration towards the implementation of the Incheon Strategy.

We do realize that the Incheon Strategy is the first set of regionally agreed disability-inclusive development goals. This is well incorporated in the clause for equality for ALL Fijians alike in the 2013 Fijian Constitution and in the Bill of Rights Chapter 2(42).

I take this time to walk you back in time to the chronology of events by Fiji:

- Fiji was a signatory to the Incheon Strategy in the late 2012 and Fiji has progressed ahead on the rights of persons with disabilities.

- At policy level, **The Fiji National Disability Policy (2008 – 2018)**, provides a framework for addressing disability in Fiji and to develop a more ‘inclusive’ society, create greater awareness of the needs of people with disabilities and identify priority areas for action to dismantle barriers hindering the full participation of people with disabilities in the social and economic life of the Fiji Islands. This policy reflects the priorities and views of the people of Fiji based on comprehensive community consultations. (*Source: Fiji’s response to Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights with regard to the HRC resolution 28/4 on the rights of persons with disabilities.*)

- In 2013, the new Disability Rights legislation was formulated. **The legislation has progressed on as The Rights of Persons with**

- On 7th June 2017, the UNCRPD instruments were deposited by the Honorable Prime Minister of Fiji in New York following the endorsement of Fiji’s parliament on 22nd March, 2017.

- Furthermore, my Ministry has recently established a dedicated unit to serve the interests of people living with disabilities and to influence change at the policy level by acting as an advisor to government.

In anticipation of the implementation of the Disability Bill when enacted and compliance to UNCRPD, the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons has been allocated funding of $1.2 million dollars.

- Government has allocated a budget of $7 million as a new social protection allowance for persons with permanent disabilities by providing a monthly allowance of $90.00 per person. The Disability Allowance can be accessed through any Social Welfare office located in each town in Fiji.

- $1.1 million dollars is provided as grants to Disability Provider Organizations serving disabled persons to help them strengthen their service delivery and administration.

- Apart from this $500,000 has been allocated to construct a Disability Centre in the western part of Viti Levu in Fiji. This center will be similar to an existing center in the Northern Division.
• There is a continued 300% tax deduction, on wages paid to disabled employees and 100% bus fare subsidy for persons living with disabilities. The bus fare subsidy program began in 2011 with full funding from Government, administered under the Department of Social Welfare.

• The Ministry of Youth has received an allocation of $120,000 in the National Budget to promote participation of persons with disabilities in sporting activities. This is managed by the Fiji National Sports Commission and will help to train personnel to promote disability inclusion in sports and for our disabled sports organizations to support the process.

• The Fijian Government has provided funding to the Fiji Roads Authority to ensure that new roads and footpaths are disabled-friendly and to provide easy access to wheelchair users. Apart from this, we have made a separate allocation of $500,000 to the Fiji Road Authority to retrofit existing footpaths, starting within the municipalities. We have allocated money to retrofit government offices that are visited by large numbers of citizens to make them accessible to the disabled.

• The Fijian Government has allocated $850,000 in this fiscal year’s budget to the Frank Hilton Organisation, an organization that works to detect disabilities in very young children and then intervene with appropriate therapies. The
Hilton Organization’s speech therapists, audiologists, physical therapists and counselors are widely respected for the outstanding work they do in diagnosing and treating disabilities and in working closely with families to help them adapt to raising children with special needs. With early intervention, proper attention and loving families who are prepared to help them, they can look forward to meaningful and productive lives.

- Furthermore, there are 43 mainstream schools that are now inclusive schools. From this 43, 24 schools are receiving special education grants to ensure that students with special needs are accorded the attention they deserve’. (SOURCE: PS Education 9/2017 Fiji TV).

- To improve Fiji’s data on persons with disabilities, we had successfully included the 4 questions from the Washington Questionnaire in the national census conducted this year.

- Following elections in 2014, the Fijian Government committed to a Ministry for Women, **Children** and Poverty Alleviation.

- Goal 7 (Ensure disability disaster preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction) of the Incheon Strategy is linked to STG Goals nos.1,9,11, and 13 and involvement of persons with
disabilities in the decision making process as stipulated in the 2014 Sendai Framework.

- The Fijian government has invented that the use of gender and social lenses is key for inclusiveness to risk informed all development agenda.

In highlighting the value of multi-ministerial and multi-stakeholder approach to accelerate the implementation of Incheon Strategy, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation through the Department of Social Welfare and all collaborating agencies, emphasizes advocacy work and community-based awareness that involves our communities. We believe that maximum involvement of families, community, faith-based organizations and stakeholders will see the holistic progress of such initiatives, achieving positive results.

- Ladies and gentlemen, the smart preparation by the Multi sectorial working group with the Fiji Election Office in preparation for the 2018 general election, made a resounding target to make all polling stations disability friendly.

- In the field of Inclusive Sports, the Ministry of Youth through Sports Commission leads the implementation which funding support of USD$100,000 received from the Republic of Korea through the UNOSDP. The donors are adamant that this funding promotes activities from which a curriculum will be formed. This will go a long way to ensure that we meet our commitments as we strengthen our advocacy for inclusive sports.
• We are also keen on ensuring that Fijian women living with disabilities are given equal opportunities when it comes to promoting women’s economic empowerment. We have a number of women’s groups formed by women living with disabilities who have been assisted by the Department of Women to establish and run income generating projects for their livelihoods, whereby they use their artistic abilities and skills to craft and design products which they sell. Screen printing has proven to be a viable business of this nature for them.

• It is very important that Climate change mitigation and adaptation takes into account the vulnerability of people with disabilities and this was adequately covered in the recent COP 23, in Bonn. To conclude, the Fijian Government’s mantra in ensuring that “No one is Left Behind” was strongly mentioned by the President of COP 23 – our Honorable Prime Minister.

The next course of action from this High Level Meeting is to table the outcome document to Cabinet for information. We will devise our new Strategic Plan for People with Disabilities to guide us for the next 5 years. The timeliness for this forum is a huge advantage to us as we will have recommendations and best practices to strengthen acceleration to the implementation of the Incheon Strategy and the SDG 2030.

Thank you