PERMANENT SECRETARY FOR FISHERIES AND FORESTS
MR. PENE NONU BALEINABULI
OPENING REMARKS
Sixth Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development
6th December 2022

1. Bula Vinaka Excellencies, Distinguished delegates and participants, Ladies and gentlemen,

2. I welcome you this morning on behalf of the Government of Fiji, as the Forum Chair, to this important Pacific platform to review our development progress with particular reference to our global aspirations, the Sustainable Development Goals.

IMPACT OF COVID AND MULTIPLE CRISIS ON ACHIEVING THE 2030 AGENDA

3. The on-going toll of the Covid-19 pandemic has had pronounced impacts on Pacific Island Countries. The pandemic has meant that scarce resources had to be deployed to respond to the health crisis.
4. Now we are faced with multiple crisis of health, energy, food, finance, climate change, pollution etc. This has placed the achievement of SDGs at high risk across PICs.

5. There is an urgent need to redouble our efforts to ensure that we do indeed build back better from the pandemic and geopolitical crisis, while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

6. We face a long road to economic recovery. And I do not need to belabour our structural challenges due to our special geographic and physical characteristics, and our vulnerability to frequent natural disasters and external shocks.

7. We are also disadvantaged systematically by the international development system. In saying this, we welcome the progress of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) which will help Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to overcome the disadvantages we face in assessing credit, concessional financing and securing debt relief.

8. The achievement of the 2030 Agenda will be contingent on a new framework for development finance that is responsive to and that works for SIDS.

10. The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent is our collective vision, hope and ambition of the Pacific, most of all it is a unified message of resilience from a people united by the Blue Pacific and united in purpose.

11. The focus areas of the 2050 Strategy include resource and economic development, climate change and disasters, environment, and technology and connectivity, with a central focus on our ocean.

12. These themes closely align with the SDGs that will be reviewed by the High-Level Political Forum next year.

**OCEAN, CLIMATE AND DISASTER**

13. We in the Pacific have a deep concern for and commitment to combat the threat and impacts of climate change, as spelt out in the 2050 Strategy.

14. We are the stewards of the world’s largest ocean, the largest ecosystem, and the largest carbon sink. We will maintain this in our fight against climate change.
15. We welcome the recent positive developments for a Loss and Damage Fund but this must go hand in hand in maintaining 1.5 degrees Celsius. The time for hard conversations on fossil fuels and alternative energy sources is today and action needs to be undertaken now.

16. On the global stage, the region has been leading in efforts to ratify and implement the Paris Agreement, and actively advocating for high mitigation ambitions and deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions – aiming for net zero greenhouse gas emission by 2050.

17. Acknowledging the impacts of climate change on people, the integration of human mobility in climate change responses is also key. Nationally, we have a well-established legal and policy framework, including planned relocation guidelines, displacement guidelines and a climate change Act that acknowledges these policies.

18. As a contribution to the Pacific region’s collective response to climate change, Fiji together with Tuvalu, have led the initiative to develop a regional framework to respond to climate change-related mobility. This is so we are prepared for the worst-case scenario and will safeguard the dignity and lives of all communities if they relocate or migrate due to climate change.

19. The “Nadi declaration” adopted by Pacific Disaster Ministers in 2022, demonstrates the Pacific’s region’s collective
approach to strengthen resilience to climate change and disasters.

**ASIA PACIFIC COLLABORATION**

20. We recognise the need to ensure strategic and genuine regional and international partnerships to ensure our region’s resilience and ensuring sustained economic development and growth and we will continually look at opportunities to better connect with countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

21. The recently concluded G20 meeting under the Indonesian Presidency has given its assurances to further align its work with the 2030 Agenda in order to pave the way for global recovery that will correspondingly advance the SDGs achievement.

**VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW**

22. On the Voluntary National Review, this process have showcased changes to the institutional arrangements for SDG implementation, including newly established mechanisms for coordination or adjusting existing frameworks. VNRs are seen as a norm-building process and the best practices identified can be replicated across other Pacific countries.

23. Despite challenges in the lack of disaggregated data, and the lack of capacity in data collection and management, Pacific countries through their VNRs have shown a strengthening of
national ownership of the SDGs, promotion of transparency, inclusiveness and participation in reporting on development priorities, and support for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

24. In 2019, Fiji presented its VNR. Building on the experiences and lessons learned in the preparation of our first VNR on data collection and assessment, and stakeholder consultation, we are planning to report again at the High-Level Political Forum in 2023. Preparations with the support of UNESCAP and UNDP are well underway, and we look forward to the opportunity tomorrow to share experiences in the VNR session.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

25. Let me conclude, by reiterating the importance of this Pacific platform in reviewing our development progress. Let me also acknowledge the assistance of our CROP and UN Family in supporting our collective ambition for our and future generations. And I welcome the recognition of the UN in co-hosting this flagship meeting for the UN Asia Pacific Regional Commission at the Forum Secretariat headquarters, the home of the Pacific Leaders’ organisation.

26. Thank you for your attention. Vinaka Vakalevu.