UN Multi-Country Resident Coordinator Office (Suva)
Welcome Remarks
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Sixth Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (PFSD)

Reflections on SDGs in the Pacific amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, and pathways towards the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels and achieving the 2050 Strategy

- Acknowledgments:
  - Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
  - Executive Secretary of UN ESCAP
  - Members of the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen

Commend the collaboration between UNRCO, UN ESCAP, UNDP, and other UN agencies, in supporting SDG implementation through the VNR process.

Commend the progress on VNR (Tuvalu 2022) and encouraging pacific countries to start looking at a second VNR (Fiji 2023, Tonga 2024) in the coming years.

Who would imagine at the end of 2022, and entering 2023, we are entering an era of great uncertainty and disruption - political, economic, social and technological?

Uncertainty is the only certainty we find ourselves with today and twice in recent times, we have learnt this the hard way.

As we surface from an unexpected global pandemic which left us with immeasurable loss of life and brought the worst recession in 90 years,¹ we find ourselves amidst another period of political turmoil and economic unpredictability.

While the world is currently focusing on the war in Ukraine, a terrible and senseless war - there are other 32 armed conflicts still ongoing (according to to Alert international report).
Mc-Kinsey in their September 2022 analysis argued that for the third quarter this year, geopolitical instability and conflicts remain the most-cited risk to global economic growth, and inflation remains the second most cited threat.

Globally inequality is widening – between rich and poor, North and South, and developed and emerging economies.

And a cost-of-living crisis is hitting the most vulnerable people the hardest. Estimates reveal that it is unlikely that the Pacific will achieve even 20% of the SDG targets by 2030.

For us in the Pacific, the climate emergency adds another layer of increasing urgency.

Against this bleak backdrop, however, we now have a more profound knowledge of our vulnerabilities and strengths, a deeper penetration of digital technologies - particularly in rural areas - a renewed appreciation for nature, and an opportunity to take back the last two years as we reorient towards greener, more inclusive economies and societies.

So how do we address these megatrends?

First, on the food crisis:

Problem: As per FAO Russia and Ukraine are key agricultural players that combined export nearly 12% of the food calories traded globally and are major providers of basic agro-commodities. Russia is also the world’s largest exporter of fertilizers.
The Pacific is increasingly vulnerable to economic shocks due to it’s growing dependence on imported food. Wheat consumed in the Pacific countries is largely imported from elsewhere. Total wheat grain imports to the region have increased from 187,000 t in 1995 to 587,000 t in 2018 reflecting a dramatic increase in dependence. Imports of grain to the region increasing threefold since 1995.

The UN SG indicated in the recent G20 meetings that without coordinated action, this year’s crisis of affordability may become next year’s global food shortage.

Since many governments in the Global South, battered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the inequality in resources available for the recovery, and the climate crisis, have no fiscal space to help their people deal with rising food and fertilizer prices accelerated by the war- UN SG has called for a SDG Stimulus is aimed at providing countries- needing financing- with adequate liquidity, through a wider reallocation of Special Drawing Rights, concessional financing to Middle Income Countries in distress, and effective mechanisms of debt relief and restructuring.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative, and the agreement to facilitate the supplies of Russian fertilizers, including ammonia, to global markets will be key.

Call to action:

It’s now imperative to transform investments to revive and reinforce agriculture- our food source- along with training a workforce to meet the demands of modern agriculture- to address the issues of supply chains and architect inter- sectoral supply chains- linking to tourism for instance.
**Second**, there is a need to address energy independence and resilience, in the Pacific with support from the international community could **take the lead in moving into sustainable energy production** which Fiji is already doing.

**Third**, there is a need to **invest in strengthening governance and public capacity to mitigate and deal with shocks and crises**, including future pandemics. Not only is the Government that strong, but in tandem, the society is also resilient.

**Fourth**, current tourism recovery in countries like Fiji is an opportune time for Fiji to rebuild the touristic offer with added value, including ‘safety’ as a defining characteristic, and an essential investment in sustainability and greening the tourism sector given environmental impact concerns.

Potential for Fiji, Palau and Vanautu to lead as brand ambassador for green/sustainable tourism. Reorienting towards greener tourism. COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, saw positive changes and a shift in priorities towards sustainable regenerative tourism, UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean, Peter Thomson noted, “A net zero future for tourism largely depends on the ocean and the regeneration of destinations, notably coastal destinations. We have to turn tourism into a sector that is responsive to the climate emergency.”

While the Pacific is slowly and steadily on its way to recovery, governments will need to identify new levers of growth, and strategies for mobilizing additional domestic resources to steer a resilient recovery of the economy and to rebuild fiscal buffers in a growth-friendly way to create space for future natural disaster responses and to ensure public debt sustainability.

A potential lever for Fiji’s economic, social, gender transformation includes harnessing the region’s demographic boom and unleashing the true potential of blue economy sectors.
Strong recovery from COVID-19 requires a review of national wealth (natural, human and productive capital) to identify potential entry points for diversification and shock-proof economies in Fiji and other Pacific nations. In view of this, the UN will devote the next five years to strengthening ecosystem services, redesigning agri-food systems, advancing energy transition, supporting blue economy-based diversification, accelerating digital transformation, and expanding access to affordable financing through our new Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework – the blueprint for our work in the Pacific over the next five years.