Kia Orana Excellency’s, Distinguished delegates and participants, Ladies and gentlemen,

Warm greetings from the Government and people of the Cook Islands.

Pacific communities offer unmatched opportunities to spearhead a new model of development pathways to unite prosperity with planet, and people with peace in the twenty-first century inter-connected world.

At the outset, I would like to emphasize that Pacific needs to foster regional harmony and cooperation to address the adverse socio-economic impacts due to COVID-19, safeguard from the ongoing climate emergencies and geopolitical crises.

Sustainable Development Goals continue to provide a significant prospect to unite our voices in the Pacific to take concrete actions, and prioritize development agenda for everyone, everywhere.

It is my pleasure to deliver the special remarks to the Sixth Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

I would like to highlight three policy measures to advance Sustainable Development Goals in the Pacific, which are linked to our experience in the Cook Islands.

First, Te Kaveinga Nui (National Sustainable Development Plan) priorities are directly linked to the Pacific Sustainable Development Forum agenda.
In our national Economic Development Strategy, we have underscored five objectives:

- improving equity and access for all – to economic opportunities and services;
- transforming the economy – resilient to shocks;
- building human capital;
- investing, both public and private, for improved access to goods and services; and
- greening the economy – using fewer resources and generating fewer emissions.

As we prepare our communities to become more inclusive and resilient, these national objectives are well developed to help protect us from new and emerging crises at the national and regional level.

This long-term term economic development is the way to underscore strategic investments in productive sectors, while managing the growing sustainable development needs in the face of rising fuel, food and financing costs.

We are optimistic that these long-term visions of my government would provide necessary cushion to protect our people and planet in the short to medium terms.

**Second**, climate action is now a top priority of our communities, and we must deliver on the implementation plan and decisions of the COP 27 that I also had the great honour of championing from the Pacific perspectives.

Cook Islands has made an extraordinary progress towards increasing renewable energy penetration since the 100% target was set in 2012. At the national level, smart energy technology developments include: electric vehicle charging station; a number of resorts have invested in electric vehicles and scooters; and a programme to replace end-of-life Government vehicles with electric cars.
In this context, Marae Moana, a multiple-use marine park which extends over the entire Exclusive Economic Zone, an area of 1.9 million square kilometres, has been providing a pioneering way to protect biodiversity and increase resilience to natural calamities. This 2017 Act further promotes sustainable development by balancing economic growth interests such as tourism, fishing and deep-sea mining, with conserving core biodiversity and natural assets, in the ocean, reefs and islands.

**Third**, development financing options and instruments are essential components to address the setback in implementing Sustainable Development Goals in our communities, especially due to limited fiscal space and debt distress.

Cook Islands have been working to formulate national policies to mitigate the financial exposure to external shocks such as COVID-19, natural disaster and climate change risk.

To name a few, we established a disaster emergency trust fund in 2017; took out insurance coverage under the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative for cyclones, with pay-out based on the assessed severity of a specific cyclone; and organized loan arrangements with multilateral banks, which is triggered and drawn down in the event of a catastrophe, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In particular, Stabilisation Account, which commenced with $56.7 million of unencumbered cash, is designed to be used to cover operational and capital expenditure during periods of economic contractions, including disaster recovery, such the current pandemic-induced shocks.

2022 Pacific Regional Debt Conference, where I underscored the need to increase productivity and sustainable economic growth and recovery. I am confident that by working together, we could take measures to restructure debt to minimize debt servicing needs, and to propel economic and financing opportunities in the Pacific nations, especially for our Small Island Developing States.
With regional solidarity, our government recognise the United Nations effort to develop a robust Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) framework for tracking SIDS’ structural vulnerabilities. The framework provides a unique set of policy measures and structures vulnerabilities which impede the ability to achieve sustainable development.

Let us strengthen governance structure and international solidarity in steering the accessibility of grants and concessional financing from the Multilateral Development Banks and other development partners.

Through the conversation of the SIDS global programme of action, I look forward to your strong leadership.

As a leader of a Pacific nation, I would like to express appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Henry Puna, Secretary General, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Her Excellency Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the UN and Executive Secretary of ESCAP for co-organizing the Sixth Pacific Sustainable Development Forum. This Pacific platform is a concrete example of working together with the CROP agency and the UN system for our shared identity and development aspirations in the Pacific.

In closing, as incoming Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, I recognise the significance of this platform to facilitate exchange of ideas, share experiences, identify policy actions to accelerate Sustainable Development Goals, within the context of the 2050 Strategy.

I look forward to uniting and bringing these Pacific messages to the Tenth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development in March 2023 in Bangkok, which is a regional preparatory forum for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York.

Kia Manuia.