



## **AGENDA ITEM 2 (a)**

### **GENERAL DEBATE ON THEME** **ACCELERATING CLIMATE ACTION IN ASIA** **AND THE PACIFIC FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

*(Time limit: 3-5 minutes)*

---

*[The Chair of the 79 Commission Session - Hon. Fekitamoeloa Útoikamanu, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Tourism, of Tonga]*

**Madam Chair,**

- At the outset, I wish to congratulate you on your election as Chair of the 79<sup>th</sup> Commission Session and I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussions on the theme.

**Excellencies,**

- On 15 November 2022, the world's population surpassed 8 billion people. The Asia-Pacific region comprises 60% of this population, and its demographic diversity comprises the most populous and the least populous countries in the world.
- Along with the challenges of exponential population growth, our countries struggled to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic impact of lockdowns, closure of borders, halt in businesses and geo-political aggression, has driven up global inflation, created food and energy shortages.

- Such times call for wisdom and visionary leadership and stewardship of our collective resources.
- For us in the **Blue Pacific**, climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of our people and ecosystems. It is a threat to our culture, history and our identity as a people.
- We are in urgent need of better solutions and mitigation for recurring and intensive natural disasters, which have displaced peoples and communities, exposed socio-economic vulnerabilities, and exacerbated poverty.
- Keeping the **1.5-degree Celsius goal** within reach, is the ultimate achievement. However, it calls for radical and immediate change, through rapid, deep and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

## **Excellencies,**

- The theme of this 79<sup>th</sup> Commission Session is apt in calling for *Accelerating Climate Action in Asia and the Pacific, for Sustainable Development*.
- Climate change is the most significant challenge to achieving long term sustainable development. This is the reality for us here today. We are very concern that while the Asia-Pacific region remains the biggest contributor to GHG emissions in the atmosphere since 2020, the trajectory is not declining hence exposing our island states to escalating threats of destructions, loss of biodiversity and livelihoods, and damaged infrastructures in the months ahead. This is the reality of the threats and risks we are facing every day in the Pacific.

- Our Pacific Leaders have adopted the 2050 **Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent**, in our concerted efforts and determination to address current and future issues affecting our sub-region – the most pressing of which - is climate change. Despite our best efforts, increasing levels of greenhouse emissions continues to directly hit us, yet we are the least contributors to it.
- The Asia Pacific region records a high usage of fossil fuel as primary energy supply. Today, I ask of us is “**what else? What else can we do, better and together, to address the global climate crisis?**”
- Our overarching strategies must tailor development models for the Small Island States. We cannot have a one-size fits all approach. Use of fossils must cease. A long-term strategy must be in place. And the most effective long-term strategy is mitigation. The region has to abide by its legal commitments in the Paris Agreement.
- Emissions gaps in key sectors must be addressed through increased efforts to transition away from fossil fuels to innovative renewable sources of energy.
- National energy systems, new technical capacities and significant investment in supply and infrastructure developments are required to improve energy efficiency.
- A low-carbon future will have development benefits for all of us.

- Even with our minimal emissions, Fiji is committed to its **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)** re-emphasizing reductions of 30% by year 2030 in the energy and transport sector. Our **NDC Investment Plan** prioritizes these targets for implementation.
- We are undertaking proactive and innovative climate adaptation measures including State-led relocation. To-date, we have facilitated the relocation of 6 communities since 2011. There are 42 other communities requesting to be relocated due to the sea level rise, coastal inundation, coastal erosion, loss of livelihood, and damages to infrastructure and assets.

### **Excellencies,**

- The urgency and the complexity of the climate crisis demands actions of extraordinary depth and scale.
- We must forge deeper commitments, cooperation, to keep global warming to under **1.5 degrees Celsius. There is no plan B for us!**
- I thank you Chair.