

National Statement
ESCAP 79th Session of the Commission
Statement delivered by Sylvain KALSAKAU
Tuesday, 16 May 2023
UN Conference Centre
Bangkok, Thailand

Madame Chair;

Madame Executive Secretary;

Excellencies;

Distinguished participants,

Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Madame, on your election as Chair of ESCAP's 79th Session of the Commission. Vanuatu has full confidence in your leadership as you steer the Commission through the challenge of the next 12 months.

Vanuatu highly appreciates the theme topic of this year's Commission Session "Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development" as Vanuatu faces growing and existential threats, and as we lead a range of international action-oriented initiatives.

As we mark the mid-point of implementing the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, we must acknowledge the scientific evidence that the Asia-Pacific region is experiencing more frequent & destructive climate-induced disasters, making the theme of this 79th session timely and necessary.

Just weeks ago, Vanuatu was pummeled by two category four cyclones within 48 hours of each other. Never had our small island nation experienced back-to-back cyclones impacting more than half our population. We did not cause this devastation, yet we bear the brunt of the resulting loss and damage.

With insufficient greenhouse gas reduction, an expansion of fossil fuel production, and pledges of climate finance from developed country parties unmet, it is clear that the Asia-Pacific region has a difficult period ahead, reversing multiple years of hard-won development gains.

Vanuatu aims to be a leader in accelerating climate action, at the same time as we respond and recover from the climate crises in our islands.

We revised and enhanced our NDC to reconfirm the 100% renewable electricity target by 2030, while at the same time making 132 adaptation commitments and 12 commitments specifically addressing loss and damage.

If one of the most vulnerable and one of the least contributors to greenhouse gas emissions in the world can rise to this level of ambition, so too can all others to keep us below 1.5C.

As COP negotiations continue to delay adequate responses, Vanuatu successfully, and in partnership with 131 Co-Sponsoring nations, saw a UN General Assembly Resolution adopted by consensus which has now kickstarted a legal process at the UN International Court of Justice to determine State obligations and responsibilities on climate action. All States here are invited to make submissions to the Court by the 20 October 2023 deadline.

Where existing international law is not yet sufficiently clear, or not fit for purpose to keep us below 1.5C, Vanuatu is working to accelerate change.

We invite you to join us as we push towards criminalizing Ecocide, the widespread, long-term and severe destruction of the natural environment, under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

You are also welcome to join Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Tonga, Fiji, Niue, Solomon Islands and others in the Pacific and beyond calling for the development of a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty that will finally address a just and equitable transition away from the source of the climate emergency: oil, gas and coal.

In summary, Madame Chair, Madame Executive Secretary and excellencies, you can be assured that in Vanuatu you have a strong ally in accelerating climate action in the Asia Pacific Region and in the world.

Tankio Tumas