Remarks by Kim Allen Youth Representative at the Pacific Regional Debt Conference

Salutations

- Secretary-General of the Pacific Island Forum
- Hon. Ministers, Government Representatives and leaders,
- Excellencies
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Development Partners
- Civil Society Organizations
- Fellow youth leaders and participants;

Gutpla day or avinun olgeta!

My name is Kim Allen from Papua New Guinea. I am a member of the PIF SG’s Young Climate Leaders Alliance and the Pacific Resilience Partnership Youth Working Group, both youth networks have membership of youth leaders across the region.

I am humbled and honored to speak on behalf of fellow youths at this significant Pacific Regional Debt Conference.

I would like to also acknowledge fellow young people, leaders and organizations across the region that support young people in addressing issues that affect us, the young people.

Our young people’s concerns:

The convening of this conference comes at a critical moment to address increasing debt amidst COVID-19 and the impacts of climate change.

I noted this week’s deliberations on debt and climate change clearly show the extent of the challenges and impact not only affect young people but every age group and sector. As all speakers have alluded to, Covid-19 has worsened these challenges and the young and vulnerable are the most impacted.

The simple truth is that the future of young people is at risk from debt implications and the impacts of climate change.

It is not a choice - let me strongly emphasize what my fellow youth speaker Josaia Tokoni’s said earlier this week, “we, the young people of the Pacific, do not wish to inherit a legacy of debt.”

The debt pressure from current governments will define the future of young people either to carry a burden of debt or live a life of fulfilment.

Debt is generational and intergenerational!
Young people in the formal sector raise concerns that their salary wages remain stagnant while there are increasing high-income tax rates and food prices. There are reports of human rights and environmental issues instigated by foreign multinational companies due to greed, money and power. The average youth unemployment rate in the Pacific is 23 per cent compared to the global average of 12.6 per cent.

This affects over 50 per cent of the region’s population who are below the age of 25.

The region has seen communities facing the impacts of climate change from rising sea levels, water salinity, food scarcity and increasing natural disasters such as volcanoes, earthquakes, drought, floods and cyclones.

Yes, the region has made some progress in young people’s access to health and education. There is still a lot to be done. Despite the economic situation and climate impacts, young people are resilient through our social structures and our subsistent way of life.

We need to act strategically now! This conference could be a moment for the Pacific region to come together and draw the line to decide the socioeconomic and development progress of the region.

The conference:

The conference provides the opportunity to rethink all your actions as government leaders and critical decision makers and consider the future we collectively want.

In saying that, Pacific Island Member States need to harness the potential of young innovators and creators, Small and Medium Enterprises, Youth Incubation Centers and training programs to create market platforms that allow economic prosperity and improved livelihoods at community levels.

Further, there need to be more financial support systems, mentorship programs and education curriculum at national levels to encourage and empower young people to be entrepreneurs.

Together, we can correct our actions toward debt, and become leaders in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and fisheries - pathways towards a green and blue economy. This is the future we want!

Our communal way of life across the Pacific reminds us that we are stronger when we are together. Young people want to be part of the solution. Some are already leaders in various sectors.

As a young person, I am humbled and grateful to listen and raise these concerns to decision-makers across the region and abroad.
I commend the leadership of the Pacific Islands Forum, partners and organizers for ensuring that young people are at the table of discussion and we would like to see this continue across all sectors and fields.

**Joint efforts with young people**

The youths of the Pacific are willing to learn from your wisdom, experience and guidance to collectively address the issues that affect our region in the face of climate change and economic downfalls.

With that, I thank you once again the Secretary-General, distinguished guests and youth partners for your commitment to the future of young people.

May the Heavenly Father give you the grace and wisdom in your decision making.

**Tenk yu tru!**

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