The Chair,
Honorable Ministers
Excellencies
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentleman

1.0 Introduction
The inclusion, protection, health and provision of enabling environments for the specific and generic population cohorts of Fiji’s population, demands that we place sustainability and rights-based approaches at the heart of our implementation agendas for our people.

Acknowledgement
At the outset, I wish to acknowledge the United Nations Development Fund (UNFPA) and ESCAP, for this great opportunity to share population dynamics, experiences and opportunities to deal with population and development issues.

Following our recent election in Fiji, the victorious Fiji First Party will continue for another 4 years creating history for not only being a validated election process but also one with
19.6% being women parliamentarians. This is represents a slight increase of women in parliament from the 2014 election. We now have both the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Fijian Parliament as women and this moment has written a new chapter in our history. The rich investment in infrastructure will benefit access of our people to services and the economic empowerment of women and the disadvantaged members of our country.

2.0 Population Demographics

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In addressing the agenda of population and development, it is critical to understand the nature and implications of national population demographics. The ignorance to such shall only perpetuate the issues on equity, inclusivity and sustainability.

According to the recent information on Fiji’s National Census Data of 2017, Fiji’s total population comprised of 884,887 persons. Out of which 55.9% were from urban areas and 41.9% were from rural areas. The gender aspect to this confirms that males comprised 50.6% of Fiji’s population whilst females made up 49.3% of the population. However, in the 60 plus age bracket, indicated greater female longevity between 50 -60% of the older persons population. The decline in annual growth rate and migration have been identified as key factors leading to the decline. The median age of 27.5 years and trends in all age cohorts project that we will be an aged nation in the next 3 decades. This is not long and demands strategic preparedness across all domains of development.

- Children between the ages of 1 to 14 years comprised 21% of Fiji’s population
- Youths between the ages of 15 -24 years comprised 16.7% of the population
- Adults between the ages of 25-59 years comprised of 44% of the total population (396,912)
• Older Persons at the age of 60 years and above comprised of 9% of Fiji’s total population (80,483), an increase of 47,616 over the last 10 years (2007 -2017). Thus, an average of 4,700 persons becomes part of the 60+ category each year.
• Persons with Disabilities comprised of 13.7% of Fiji’s population (113,595).

3.0 National Commitments to Population Development

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• The Fiji Government commitment to Population Development indicators has been generically ensured through the 2013 Constitution. Thus, providing for a wide range of socio-economic rights. These rights include rights to education, access to health care, housing and sanitation, reasonable access to transportation, food security and safe water, and social security schemes.

• Under Fiji’s 5-year and 20-year National Development Plan of 2017, Government is mandated to improve the living standards of all Fijians. This is attainable through fair and efficient delivery of social services. The heart of the plan scribes the gender and social inclusion in the vision to transform Fiji.

• Child Care and Protection remains a core aspect of Government policy deliverable. Over the last twelve years, Governments commitment and joint collaboration with key stakeholders has witnessed strides in the review of existing legislations, creating mechanisms to make child welfare reporting mandatory for professionals as well as enabling safe mediums for children to voice their issues to authorities. Children are our gifts and we must protect and nurture them to realize their full potential.

• The Fiji COP 23 Presidency since November 2017, through the Talanoa Dialogue approach, provided an elevated platform of lobbying real constraints faced by the Pacific region in relation to Climate Change. The Fiji Government continues to review its
interventions through legislation, coordination and implementation across the government service delivery system. This are aimed at elevated responses to preparations prior to, as well as during and after disasters.

- Similarly, Government has made significant strides in reviewing and incorporating the aspects of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in the new Disability Act of 2017. This complements the implementation of the mandate for persons with disabilities through strengthened and enhanced resources and mechanisms to ensure the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities in Fiji.

- In relation to addressing the Gender based discriminations, the Fiji Government continues has continued to use the highest leadership platforms in Government to influence and support policy and programmatic interventions to empower and protect women and girls from abuse and violence. Recently, over the last decade, women have access to income generating opportunities/ self-sustaining initiatives both locally and abroad. Women, are protected by Law in case of violence and the arrangements to have safe spaces for women and girls to voice their issues, as well as a safe roof during episodes of violence.

- The Older Persons comprise an increasing proportion of the population as per the population ageing phenomenon. Government’s policies on ageing aims to promote ageing with dignity in either in-family, in-community or institutional care. As such Government has legislated the establishment of a national mechanism to ensure that matters of concern on ageing are captured and addressed. In the past five years, Government has made significant achievements in terms of a legislation to mandate the establishment of a National Advisory arm of government on older persons, created a social security scheme for older persons and is pension tested as well as 100% concession on bus fares for older persons aged 60 plus, and a new initiative is the insurance cover for older persons under the Government pension scheme.

- Access to Services remains a basic solution for mostly remote locations either in the interior and maritime localities. Government has enhanced advocacy and awareness through the
Rights, Empowerment and Cohesion (REACH) for Rural and Urban Fijians. The program aims to promote peace building, social cohesion and inclusiveness, thus providing legal literacy training, access to services associated with the specific rights and strengthens institutional capacities to deliver the required services in community settings. This platform has enabled unregistered adults and children to access Government Services, thus leaving no Fijian behind in the development agenda. It is the means to the promise that we will leave no one behind. Our government has established this as a national program with a dedicated budgetary allocation. REACH was realized through funding from the Government of Japan through UNDP. The project has gained dimension in both service coverage and the number of agencies that yield to the one stop gateway. It has eliminated silos between agencies as this is a service delivery platform using mobile buses (service on wheels).

5.0 Challenges/ Opportunities

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Despite the progressive approach to development, Fiji faces 3 prominent challenges as an implementor of services. These include:

i. Human/ Financial Resource Constraints – Government may wish to consider investing in structured and performance based human resources as well as financial resources to invest in areas that critically need resourcing accordingly.

ii. Inefficient Data and Information Systems – Through proper validation of issues and specifications of key indicators, the systems to manage both data and information are to be outsourced to credible institutions to resolve current limitations in both macro and micro terms. Though capacity building in this area will continue to arise, Fiji regards that data system development is very important. It is the skeleton to the life of the population and development agenda.
iii. Segmented Service delivery – Solution driven approaches to segmented services will require a renewed approach to formal and transparent partnerships where it is clear what is expected of both parties. Proper monitoring and Evaluation must be conducted to validate the way forward.

Fiji hold fast to have good relations as a paramount social issue for the failure to do so gives rise to various forms of social illness. There are good Pacific platforms to share experiences and challenges for population and development. Preservation of culture, traditions and heritage must not be forgotten in population and development discussions. Reshaping gender stereotypes and men involvement in the quest to improve gender Inequality makes ICPD POA purpose driven.

Thank you.